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THE EARTHLY PARADISE.

THE

EARTHLY PARADISE

A POEM.

61048

BY

WILLIAM MORRIS,

AUTHOR OF THE LIFE AND DEATH OF JASON.

SECOND EDITION.

F. S. ELLIS, 33 *King Street, Covent Garden.*

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TO

MY WIFE

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK.

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THE

EARTHLY PARADISE.

OF Heaven or Hell I have no power to sing,
I cannot ease the burden of your fears,
Or make quick-coming death a little thing,
Or bring again the pleasure of past years,
Nor for my words shall ye forget your tears,
Or hope again for aught that I can say,
The idle singer of an empty day.

But rather, when aweary of your mirth,
From full hearts still unsatisfied ye sigh,
And, feeling kindly unto all the earth,
Grudge every minute as it passes by,
Made the more mindful that the sweet days die—
—Remember me a little then I pray,
The idle singer of an empty day.

The heavy trouble, the bewildering care
That weighs us down who live and earn our bread,
These idle verses have no power to bear;

So let me sing of names remembered,
Because they, living not, can ne'er be dead,
Or long time take their memory quite away
From us poor singers of an empty day.

Dreamer of dreams, born out of my due time,
Why should I strive to set the crooked straight?
Let it suffice me that my murmuring rhyme
Beats with light wing against the ivory gate,
Telling a tale not too importunate
To those who in the sleepy region stay,
Lulled by the singer of an empty day.

Folk say, a wizard to a northern king
At Christmas-tide such wondrous things did show,
That through one window men beheld the spring,
And through another saw the summer glow,
And through a third the fruited vines a-row,
While still, unheard, but in its wonted way,
Piped the drear wind of that December day.

So with this Earthly Paradise it is,
If ye will read aright, and pardon me,
Who strive to build a shadowy isle of bliss
Midmost the beating of the steely sea,
Where tossed about all hearts of men must be;
Whose ravening monsters mighty men shall slay,
Not the poor singer of an empty day.

PROLOGUE—THE WANDERERS.

ARGUMENT.

CERTAIN gentlemen and mariners of Norway, having considered all that they had heard of the Earthly Paradise, set sail to find it, and after many troubles and the lapse of many years came old men to some Western land, of which they had never before heard: there they died, when they had dwelt there certain years, much honoured of the strange people.

FORGET six counties overhung with smoke,
Forget the snorting steam and piston stroke,
Forget the spreading of the hideous town;
Think rather of the pack-horse on the down,
And dream of London, small, and white, and clean,
The clear Thames bordered by its gardens green;
Think, that below bridge the green lapping waves
Smite some few keels that bear Levantine staves,
Cut from the yew wood on the burnt-up hill,
And pointed jars that Greek hands toiled to fill,
And treasured scanty spice from some far sea,
Florence gold cloth, and Ypres napery,
And cloth of Bruges, and hogsheads of Guienne;
While nigh the thronged wharf Geoffrey Chaucer's pen
Moves over bills of lading—mid such times
Shall dwell the hollow puppets of my rhymes.

A nameless city in a distant sea,
White as the changing walls of faërie,
Thronged with much people clad in ancient guise
I now am fain to set before your eyes;
There, leave the clear green water and the quays,
And pass betwixt its marble palaces,
Until ye come unto the chiefest square;
A bubbling conduit is set midmost there,
And round about it now the maidens throng,
With jest and laughter, and sweet broken song,
Making but light of labour new begun
While in their vessels gleams the morning sun.
On one side of the square a temple stands,
Wherein the gods worshipped in ancient lands
Still have their altars, a great market-place
Upon two other sides fills all the space,
And thence the busy hum of men comes forth;
But on the cold side looking toward the north
A pillared council-house may you behold,
Within whose porch are images of gold,
Gods of the nations who dwelt anciently
About the borders of the Grecian sea.

Pass now between them, push the brazen door,
And standing on the polished marble floor
Leave all the noises of the square behind;
Most calm that reverent chamber shall ye find,
Silent at first, but for the noise you made
When on the brazen door your hand you laid

To shut it after you—but now behold
The city rulers on their thrones of gold,
Clad in most fair attire, and in their hands
Long carven silver-banded ebony wands;
Then from the daïs drop your eyes and see
Soldiers and peasants standing reverently
Before those elders, round a little band
Who bear such arms as guard the English land,
But battered, rent, and rusted sore, and they,
The men themselves, are shrivelled, bent, and grey;
And as they lean with pain upon their spears
Their brows seem furrowed deep with more than years;
For sorrow dulls their heavy sunken eyes,
Bent are they less with time than miseries.

Pondering on them the city grey-beards gaze
Through kindly eyes, midst thoughts of other days,
And pity for poor souls, and vague regret
For all the things that might have happened yet,
Until, their wonder gathering to a head,
The wisest man, who long that land has led,
Breaks the deep silence, unto whom again
A wanderer answers. Slowly as in pain,
And with a hollow voice as from a tomb
At first he tells the story of his doom,
But as it grows and once more hopes and fears,
Both measureless, are ringing round his ears,
His eyes grow bright, his seeming days decrease,
For grief once told brings somewhat back of peace.

THE ELDER OF THE CITY.

From what unheard-of world, in what strange keel,
Have ye come hither to our commonweal?
No barbarous race, as these our peasants say,
But learned in memories of a long-past day,
Speaking, some few at least, the ancient tongue
That through the lapse of ages still has clung
To us, the seed of the Ionian race.
Speak out and fear not; if ye need a place
Wherein to pass the end of life away,
That shall ye gain from us from this same day,
Unless the enemies of God ye are;
We fear not you and yours to bear us war,
And scarce can think that ye will try again
Across the perils of the shifting plain
To seek your own land whereso that may be:
For folk of ours bearing the memory
Of our old land, in days past oft have striven
To reach it, unto none of whom was given
To come again and tell us of the tale,
Therefore our ships are now content to sail,
About these happy islands that we know.

THE WANDERER.

Masters, I have to tell a tale of woe,
A tale of folly and of wasted life,
Hope against hope, the bitter dregs of strife,
Ending, where all things end, in death at last:

So if I tell the story of the past,
Let it be worth some little rest, I pray,
A little slumber ere the end of day.

No wonder if the Grecian tongue I know;
Since at Byzantium many a year ago
My father bore the twibil valiantly;
There did he marry, and get me, and die,
And I went back to Norway to my kin,
Long ere this beard ye see did first begin
To shade my mouth, but nathless not before
Among the Greeks I gathered some small lore,
And standing midst the Væringers, still heard
From this or that man many a wondrous word;
For ye shall know that though we worshipped God,
And heard mass duly, still of Swithiod
The Greater, Odin and his house of gold,
The noble stories ceased not to be told;
These moved me more than words of mine can say
E'en while at Micklegarth my folks did stay;
But when I reached one dying autumn-tide
My uncle's dwelling near the forest side,
And saw the land so scanty and so bare,
And all the hard things men contend with there,
A little and unworthy land it seemed,
And yet the more of Asagard I dreamed,
And worthier seemed the ancient faith of praise.

But now, but now—when one of all those days

Like Lazarus' finger on my heart should be
Breaking the fiery fixed eternity,
But for one moment—could I see once more
The grey-roofed sea-port sloping towards the shore,
Or note the brown boats standing in from sea,
Or the great dromond swinging from the quay,
Or in the beech-woods watch the screaming jay
Shoot up betwixt the tall trunks, smooth and grey—
Yea, could I see the days before distress
When very longing was but happiness.

Within our house there was a Breton squire
Well learned, who fail'd not to fan the fire
That evermore unholpen burned in me
Strange lands and things beyond belief to see;
Much lore of many lands this Breton knew;
And for one tale I told, he told me two.
He, counting Asagard a new-told thing,
Yet spoke of gardens ever blossoming
Across the western sea where none grew old,
E'en as the books at Micklegarth had told,
And said moreover that an English knight
Had had the Earthly Paradise in sight,
And heard the songs of those that dwelt therein,
But entered not, being hindered by his sin.
Shortly, so much of this and that he said
That in my heart the sharp barb entered,
And like real life would empty stories seem,
And life from day to day an empty dream.

Another man there was, a Swabian priest,
Who knew the maladies of man and beast,
And what things helped them; he the stone still sought
Whereby base metal into gold is brought,
And strove to gain the precious draught, whereby
Men live midst mortal men yet never die;
Tales of the Kaiser Redbeard could he tell
Who neither went to Heaven nor yet to Hell,
When from that fight upon the Asian plain
He vanished, but still lives to come again
Men know not how or when; but I listening
Unto this tale thought it a certain thing
That in some hidden vale of Swithiod
Across the golden pavement still he trod.

But while our longing for such things so grew,
And ever more and more we deemed them true,
Upon the land a pestilence there fell
Unheard-of yet in any chronicle,
And, as the people died full fast of it,
With these two men it chanced me once to sit,
This learned squire whose name was Nicholas,
And Swabian Laurence, as our manner was;
For could we help it scarcely did we part
From dawn to dusk: so heavy, sad at heart,
We from the castle yard beheld the bay
Upon that ne'er-to-be-forgotten day;
Little we said amidst that dreary mood
And certes nought that we could say was good.

It was a bright September afternoon,
The parched-up beech trees would be yellowing soon;
The yellow flowers grown deeper with the sun
Were letting fall their petals one by one;
No wind there was, a haze was gathering o'er
The furthest bound of the faint yellow shore;
And in the oily waters of the bay
Scarce moving aught some fisher-cobles lay,
And all seemed peace; and had been peace indeed
But that we young men of our life had need,
And to our listening ears a sound was borne
That made the sunlight wretched and forlorn—
—The heavy tolling of the minster bell—
And nigher yet a tinkling sound did tell
That through the streets they bore our Saviour Christ
By dying lips in anguish to be kissed.

At last spoke Nicholas, "How long shall we
Abide here, looking forth into the sea
Expecting when our turn shall come to die?
Fair fellows, will ye come with me and try
Now at our worst that long desired quest,
Now—when our worst is death, and life our best."
"Nay, but thou know'st," I said, "that I but wait
The coming of some man, the turn of fate,
To make this voyage—but I die meanwhile
For I am poor, though my blood be not vile,
Nor yet for all his lore doth Laurence hold
Within his crucibles aught like to gold;

And what hast thou, whose father driven forth
By Charles of Blois, found shelter in the North?
But little riches as I needs must deem."

"Well," said he, "things are better than they seem,
For 'neath my bed an iron chest I have
That holdeth things I have made shift to save
E'en for this end; moreover, hark to this,
In the next firth a fair long ship there is
Well victualled, ready even now for sea,
And I may say it 'longeth unto me;
Since Marcus Erling, late its owner, lies
Dead at the end of many miseries,
And little Kirstin, as thou well mayst know,
Would be content throughout the world to go
If I but took her hand, and now still more
Hath heart to leave this poor death-stricken shore.
Therefore my gold shall buy us Bordeaux swords
And Bordeaux wine as we go oceanwards.

"What say ye, will ye go with me to-night,
Setting your faces to undreamed delight,
Turning your backs unto this troublous hell,
Or is the time too short to say farewell?"

"Not so," I said, "rather would I depart
Now while thou speakest, never has my heart
Been set on anything within this land."

Then said the Swabian, "Let us now take hand
And swear to follow evermore this quest
Till death or life have set our hearts at rest."

So with joined hands we swore, and Nicholas said,
"To-night, fair friends, be ye apparelled
To leave this land, bring all the arms ye can
And such men as ye trust, my own good man
Guards the small postern looking towards St. Bride,
And good it were ye should not be espied,
Since mayhap freely ye should not go hence,
Thou Rolf in special, for this pestilence
Makes all men hard and cruel, nor are they
Willing that folk should 'scape if they must stay:
Be wise; I bid you for a while farewell,
Leave ye this stronghold when St. Peter's bell
Strikes midnight, all will surely then be still,
And I will bide you at King Tryggve's hill
Outside the city gates."

Each went his way
Therewith, and I the remnant of that day
Gained for the quest three men that I deemed true,
And did such other things as I must do,
And still was ever listening for the chime
Half maddened by the lazy lapse of time,
Yea, scarce I thought indeed that I should live
Till the great tower the joyful sound should give
That set us free: and so the hours went past,
Till startled by the echoing clang at last
That told of midnight, armed from head to heel
Down to the open postern did I steal,
Bearing small wealth—this sword that yet hangs he
Worn thin and narrow with so many a year,

My father's axe that from Byzantium,
With some few gems my pouch yet held, had come,
Nought else that shone with silver or with gold.
But by the postern gate could I behold
Laurence the priest all armed as if for war,
And my three men were standing not right far
From off the town-wall, having some small store
Of arms and furs and raiment: then once more
I turned, and saw the autumn moonlight fall
Upon the new-built bastions of the wall,
Strange with black shadow and grey flood of light,
And further off I saw the lead shine bright
On tower and turret-roof against the sky,
And looking down I saw the old town lie
Black in the shade of the o'er-hanging hill,
Stricken with death, and dreary, but all still
Until it reached the water of the bay,
That in the dead night smote against the quay
Not all unheard, though there was little wind.
But as I turned to leave the place behind,
The wind's light sound, the slowly falling swell,
Were hushed at once by that shrill-tinkling bell,
That in that stillness jarring on mine ears,
With sudden jangle checked the rising tears,
And now the freshness of the open sea
Seemed ease and joy and very life to me.
So greeting my new mates with little sound,
We made good haste to reach King Tryggve's mound,
And there the Breton Nicholas beheld.

Who by the hand fair Kirstin Erling held,
And round about them twenty men there stood,
Of whom the more part on the holy rood
Were sworn till death to follow up the quest,
And Kirstin was the mistress of the rest.
Again betwixt us was there little speech,
But swiftly did we set on toward the beach,
And coming there our keel, the Fighting Man,
We boarded, and the long oars out we ran,
And swept from out the firth, and sped so well
That scarcely could we hear St. Peter's bell
Toll one, although the light wind blew from land;
Then hoisting sail southward we 'gan to stand,
And much I joyed beneath the moon to see
The lessening land that might have been to me
A kindly giver of wife, child, and friend,
And happy life, or at the worser end
A quiet grave till doomsday rend the earth.

Night passed, day dawned, and we grew full of mirth
As with the ever-rising morning wind
Still further lay our threatened death behind,
Or so we thought: some eighty men we were,
Of whom but fifty knew the shipman's gear,
The rest were uplanders; midst such of these
As knew not of our quest, with promises
Went Nicholas dealing florins round about,
With still a fresh tale for each new man's doubt,
Till all were fairly won or seemed to be

To that strange desperate voyage o'er the sea.

Now if ye ask me from what land I come
With all my folly,—Viken is my home
Where Tryggve Olaf's son and Olaf's sire
Lit to the ancient Gods the sacred fire,
Unto whose line am I myself akin,
Through him who Astrid in old time did win,
King Olaf's widow: let all that go by,
Since I was born at least to misery.

Now Nicholas came to Laurence and to me
To talk of what he deemed our course should be,
To whom agape I listened, since I knew
Nought but old tales, nor aught of false and true
Amid these, for but one kind seemed to be
The Vineland voyage o'er the unknown sea
And Swegder's search for Godheim, when he found
The entrance to a new world underground;
But Nicholas o'er many books had pored
And this and that thing in his mind had stored,
And idle tales from true report he knew.
—Would he were living now, to tell to you
This story that my feeble lips must tell!
Now he indeed of Vineland knew full well,
Both from my tales where truth perchance touched lies,
And from the ancient written histories;
But now he said, "The land was good enow
That Leif the son of Eric came unto,

But this was not our world, nay scarce could be
The door into a place so heavenly
As that we seek, therefore my rede is this,
That we to gain that sure abode of bliss
Risk dying in an unknown landless sea;
Although full certainly it seems to me
All that we long for there we needs must find.
"Therefore, O friends, if ye are of my mind,
When we are passed the French and English strait
Let us seek news of that desired gate
To immortality and blessed rest
Within the landless waters of the west,
But still a little to the southward steer.
Certes no Greenland winter waits us there,
No year-long night, but rather we shall find
Spice-trees set waving by the western wind,
And gentle folk who know no guile at least,
And many a bright-winged bird and soft-skinned beast,
For gently must the year upon them fall.
"Now since the Fighting Man is over small
To hold the mighty stores that we shall need,
To turn as now to Bremen is my rede,
And there to buy a new keel with my gold,
And fill her with such things as she may hold;
And thou thenceforward, Rolf, her lord shalt be,
Since thou art not unskilled upon the sea."

But unto me most fair his saying seemed,
For of a land unknown to all I dreamed,

And certainly by some warm sea I thought
That we the soonest thereto should be brought.
Therefore with mirth enow passed every day
Till in the Weser stream at last we lay
Hearkening the bells of Bremen ring to mass,
For on a Sunday morn our coming was.
There in a while to chaffer did we fall,
And of the merchants bought a dromond tall
They called the Rose-Garland, and her we stored
With such like victuals as we well might hoard,
And arms and raiment; also there we gained
Some few men more by stories true and feigned,
And by that time, now needing nought at all,
We weighed, well armed, with good hope not to fall
Into the hands of rovers of the sea,
Since at that time had we heard certainly
Edward of England drew all men to him,
And that his fleet held whatso keel could swim
From Jutland to Land's End; for all that, we
Thought it but wise to keep the open sea
And give to warring lands a full wide berth;
Since unto all of us our lives seemed worth
A better purchase than they erst had been.

So it befell that we no sail had seen
Till the sixth day at morn, when we drew near
The land at last and saw the French coast clear,—
The high land over Guines our pilot said.
There at the day-break, we, apparelled

Like merchant ships in seeming, now perforce
Must meet a navy drawing thwart our course,
Whose sails and painted hulls not far away
Rolled slowly o'er the leaden sea and grey,
Beneath the night-clouds by no sun yet cleared;
But we with anxious hearts this navy neared,
For we sailed deep and heavy, and to fly
Would nought avail since we were drawn so nigh,
And fighting, must we meet but certain death.
Soon with amazement did I hold my breath
As from the wide bows of the Rose-Garland,
I saw the sun, new risen o'er the land,
Light up the shield-hung side of keel on keel,
Their sails like knights' coats, and the points of steel
Glittering from waist and castle and high top.
And well indeed awhile my heart might stop
As heading all the crowded van I saw,
Huge, swelling out without a crease or flaw,
A sail where, on the quartered blue and red,
In silk and gold right well apparelled,
The lilies gleamed, the thin gaunt leopards glared
Out toward the land where even now there flared
The dying beacons. Ah, with such an one
Could I from town to town of France have run
To end my life upon some glorious day
Where stand the banners brighter than the May
Above the deeds of men, as certainly
This king himself has full oft wished to die.
And who knows now beneath what field he lies,

Amidst what mighty bones of enemies?
Ah, surely it had been a glorious thing
From such a field to lead forth such a king,
That he might live again with happy days,
And more than ever win the people's praise.
Nor had it been an evil lot to stand
On the worse side, with people of the land
'Gainst such a man, when even this might fall,
That it might be my luck some day to call
My battle-cry o'er his low lying head,
And I be evermore remembered.

Well as we neared and neared, such thoughts I had
Whereby perchance I was the less a-drad
Of what might come, and at the worst we deemed
They would not scorn our swords; but as I dreamed
Of fair towns won and desperate feats of war,
And my old follies now were driven afar
By that most glorious sight, a loud halloo
Came down the wind, and one by me who knew
The English tongue cried that they bade us run
Close up and board, nor was there any one
Who durst say nay to that, so presently
Both keels were underneath the big ship's lee;
While Nicholas and I together passed
Betwixt the crowd of archers by the mast
Unto the poop, where 'neath his canopy
The king sat, eyeing us as we drew nigh.

Broad-browed he was, hook-nosed, with wide grey eyes

No longer eager for the coming prize,
But keen and steadfast, many an ageing line,
Half hidden by his sweeping beard and fine,
Ploughed his thin cheeks, his hair was more than grey,
And like to one he seemed whose better day
Is over to himself, though foolish fame
Shouts louder year by year his empty name.
Unarmed he was, nor clad upon that morn
Much like a king, an ivory hunting-horn
Was slung about him, rich with gems and gold,
And a great white ger-falcon did he hold
Upon his fist; before his feet there sat
A scrivener making notes of this or that
As the king bade him, and behind his chair
His captains stood in armour rich and fair;
And by his side unhelmed, but armed, stood one
I deemed none other than the prince his son;
For in a coat of England was he clad,
And on his head a coronel he had.
Tall was he, slim, made apt for feats of war,
A splendid lord, yea, he seemed prouder far
Than was his sire, yet his eyes therewithal
With languid careless glance seemed wont to fall
On things about, as though he deemed that nought
Could fail unbidden to do all his thought.
But close by him stood a war-beaten knight,
Whose coat of war bore on a field of white
A sharp red pile, and he of all men there
Methought would be the one that I should fear

If I led men.

But midst my thoughts I heard
The king's voice as the high seat now we neared,
And knew his speech because in French it was,
That erewhile I had learnt of Nicholas.
"Fair sirs, what are ye? for on this one day,
I rule the narrow seas mine ancient way.
Me seemeth in the highest bark I know
The Flemish handiwork, but yet ye show
Unlike to merchants, though your ships are deep
And slowly through the water do ye creep;
And thou, fair sir, seem'st journeying from the north
With peltries Bordeaux-ward? Nay then go forth
Thou wilt not harm us: yet if ye be men
Well-born and warlike, these are fair days, when
The good heart wins more than the merchant keeps,
And safest still in steel the young head sleeps;
And here are banners thou mayest stand beneath
And not be shamed either in life or death—
What, man, thou reddenest, wouldst thou say me no,
If underneath my banner thou shouldst go?
Nay, thou mayest speak, or let thy fellow say
What he is stuffed with, be it yea or nay."

For as he spoke my fellow gazed on me
With something like to fear, and hurriedly
As I bent forward, thrust me on one side,
And scarce the king's last word would he abide
But 'gan to say, "Sire, from the north we come,
Though as for me far nigher is my home.

Thy foes, my Lord, drove out my kin and me,
Ere yet thine armed hand was upon the sea;
Chandos shall surely know my father's name,
Loys of Dinan, which ill-luck, sword, and flame,
Lord Charles of Blois, the French king, and the pest
In this and that land now have laid to rest,
Except for me alone. And now, my Lord,
If I shall seem to speak an idle word
To such as thou art, pardon me therefore;
But we, part taught by ancient books and lore,
And part by what, nor yet so long ago,
This man's own countrymen have come to do,
Have gathered hope to find across the sea
A land where we shall gain felicity
Past tongue of man to tell of; and our life
Is not so sweet here, or so free from strife,
Or glorious deeds so common, that, if we
Should think a certain path at last to see
To such a place, men then could think us wise
To turn away therefrom, and shut our eyes,
Because at many a turning here and there
Swift death might lurk, or unaccustomed fear.
O King, I pray thee in this young man's face
Flash not thy banner, nor with thy frank grace
Tear him from life; but go thy way, let us
Find hidden death, or life more glorious
Than thou durst think of, knowing not the gate
Whereby to flee from that all-shadowing fate.

"O King, since I could walk a yard or twain,

Or utter anything but cries of pain,
Death was before me; yea, on the first morn
That I remember aught, among the corn
I wandered with my nurse, behind us lay
The walls of Vannes, white in the summer day,
The reapers whistled, the brown maidens sung,
As on the wain the topmost sheaf they hung,
The swallow wheeled above high up in air,
And midst the labour all was sweet and fair;
When on the winding road between the fields
I saw a glittering line of spears and shields,
And pleased therewith called out to some one by
E'en as I could; he scarce for fear could cry
'The French, the French!' and turned and ran his best
Toward the town gates, and we ran with the rest,
I wailing loud who knew not why at all,
But ere we reached the gates my nurse did fall,
I with her, and I wondered much that she
Just as she fell should still lie quietly;
Nor did the coloured feathers that I found
Stuck in her side, as frightened I crawled round,
Tell me the tale, though I was sore afeard
At all the cries and wailing that I heard.

"I say, my Lord, that arrow-flight now seems
The first thing rising clear from feeble dreams,
And that was death; and the next thing was death,
For through our house all spoke with bated breath
And wore black clothes, withal they came to me
A little child, and did off hastily

My shoon and hosen, and with that I heard
The sound of doleful singing, and afeard
Forebore to question, when I saw the feet
Of all were bare, like mine, as toward the street
We passed, and joined a crowd in such-like guise
Who through the town sang woeful litanies,
Pressing the stones with feet unused and soft,
And bearing images of saints aloft,
In hope 'gainst hope to save us from the rage
Of that fell pest, that as an unseen cage
Hemmed France about, and me and such as me
They made partakers of their misery.

"Lo death again, and if the time served now
Full many another picture could I show
Of death and death, and men who ever strive
Through every misery at least to live.
The priest within the minster preaches it,
And brooding o'er it doth the wise man sit
Letting life's joys go by. Well, blame me then,
If I who love this changing life of men,
And every minute of whose life were bliss
Too great to long for greater, but for this—
Mock me, who take this death-bound life in hand
And risk the rag to find a happy land,
Where at the worst death is so far away
No man need think of him from day to day—
Mock me, but let us go, for I am fain
Our restless road, the landless sea, to gain."

His words nigh made me weep, but while he spoke
I noted how a mocking smile just broke
The thin line of the Prince's lips, and he
Who carried the afore-named armoury
Puffed out his wind-beat cheeks and whistled low:
But the king smiled, and said, "Can it be so?
I know not, and ye twain are such as find
The things whereto old kings must needs be blind.
For you the world is wide—but not for me,
Who once had dreams of one great victory
Wherein that world lay vanquished by my throne,
And now, the victor in so many an one,
Find that in Asia Alexander died
And will not live again; the world is wide
For you I say,—for me a narrow space
Betwixt the four walls of a fighting place.
"Poor man, why should I stay thee; live thy fill,
Of that fair life, wherein thou seest no ill
But fear of that fair rest I hope to win
One day, when I have purged me of my sin.
"Farewell, it yet may hap that I a king
Shall be remembered but by this one thing,
That on the morn before ye crossed the sea
Ye gave and took in common talk with me;
But with this ring keep memory of the morn,
O Breton, and thou Northman, by this horn
Remember me, who am of Odin's blood,
As heralds say: moreover it were good
Ye had some lines of writing 'neath my seal,

Or ye might find it somewhat hard to deal
With some of mine, who pass not for a word
Whate'er they deem may hold a hostile sword."

So as we kneeled this royal man to thank,
A clerk brought forth two passes sealed and blank,
And when we had them, with the horn and ring,
With few words did we leave the noble king,
And as adown the gangway steps we passed,
We saw the yards swing creaking round the mast,
And heard the shipman's ho, for one by one
The van outsailed before, by him had run
E'en as he stayed for us, and now indeed
Of his main battle must he take good heed:
But as from off the mighty side we pushed,
And in between us the green water rushed,
I heard his scalds strike up triumphantly
Some song that told not of the weary sea,
But rather of the mead and fair green-wood,
And as we leaned o'er to the wind, I stood
And saw the bright sails leave us, and soon lost
The pensive music by the strong wind tossed
From wave to wave, then turning I espied
Glittering and white upon the weather side
The land he came from, o'er the bright green sea,
Scarce duller than the land upon our lee,
For now the clouds had fled before the sun
And the bright autumn day was well begun.
Then I cried out for music too, and heard

The minstrels sing some well remembered word,
And while they sung, before me still I gazed,
Silent with thought of many things, and mazed
With many longings; when I looked again
To see those lands, nought but the restless plain
With some far-off small fisher-boat was left;
A little hour for evermore had reft
The sight of Europe from my helpless eyes,
And crowned my store of hapless memories.

THE ELDER OF THE CITY.

Sit friends, and tell your tale which seems to us
Shall be a strange tale and a piteous,
Nor shall it lack our pity for its woe,
Nor ye due thanks for all the things ye show
Of kingdoms nigh forgot that once were great,
And small lands come to glorious estate.
But, sirs, ye faint, behold these maidens stand
Bearing the blood of this our sunburnt land
In well-wrought cups,—drink now of this, that while
Ye poor folk wandered, hid from fortune's smile
Abode your coming, hidden none the less
Below the earth from summer's happiness.

THE WANDERERS.

Fair sirs, we thank you, hoping we have come
Through many wanderings to a quiet home
Befitting dying men—Good health and peace

To you and to this land, and fair increase
Of everything that ye can wish to have!

But to my tale: A fair south-east wind drave
Our ships for ten days more, and ever we
Sailed mile for mile together steadily,
But the tenth day I saw the Fighting Man
Brought up to wait me, and when nigh I ran
Her captain hailed me, saying that he thought
That we too far to northward had been brought,
And we must do our southing while we could,
So as his will to me was ever good
In such like things, we changed our course straightway.
And as we might till the eleventh day
Stretched somewhat south, then baffling grew the wind,
But as we still were ignorant and blind
Nor knew our port, we sailed on helplessly
O'er a smooth sea, beneath a lovely sky,
And westward ever, but no signs of land
All through these days we saw on either hand,
Nor indeed hoped to see, because we knew
Some watery desert we must journey through,
That had been huge enough to keep all men
From gaining that we sought for un il then.

Yet when I grew downcast, I did not fail
To call to mind, how from our land set sail
A certain man, and, after he had passed
Through many unknown seas, did reach at last

A rocky island's shore one foggy day,
And while a little off the land he lay
As in a dream he heard the folk call out
In his own tongue, but mazed and all in doubt
He turned therefrom, and afterwards in strife
With winds and waters, much of precious life
He wasted utterly, for when again
He reached his port after long months of pain,
Unto Biarmeland he chanced to go,
And there the isle he left so long ago
He knew at once, where many Northmen were.
And such a fate I could not choose but fear
For us sometimes; and sometimes when at night
Beneath the moon I watched the foam fly white
From off our bows, and thought how weak and small
Showed the Rose-Garland's mast that looked so tall
Beside the quays of Bremen; when I saw
With measured steps the watch on toward me draw,
And in the moon the helmsman's peering face,
And 'twixt the cordage strained across my place
Beheld the white sail of the Fighting Man
Lead down the pathway of the moonlight wan—
Then when the ocean seemed so measureless
The very sky itself might well be less,
When midst the changeless piping of the wind,
The intertwined slow waves pressed on behind
Rolled o'er our wake and made it nought again,
Then would it seem an ill thing and a vain
To leave the hopeful world that we had known,

When all was o'er, hopeless to die alone
Within this changeless world of waters grey.
But hope would come back to me with the day,
The talk of men, the viol's quivering strings,
Would bring my heart to think of better things.
Nor were our folk down-hearted through all this;
For partly with the hope of that vague bliss
Were they made happy, partly the soft air
And idle days wherethrough we then did fare
Were joy enow to rude sea-faring folk.

But this our ease at last a tempest broke
And we must scud before it helplessly,
Fearing each moment lest some climbing sea
Should topple o'er our poop and end us there,
Nathless we 'scaped, and still the wind blew fair
For what we deemed was our right course; but when
On the third eve, we, as delivered men,
Took breath because the gale was now blown out,
And from our rolling deck we looked about
Over the ridges of the dark grey seas,
And saw the sun, setting in golden ease,
Smile out at last from out the just-cleared sky
Over the ocean's weltering misery,
Still nothing of the Fighting Man we saw,
Which last was seen when the first gusty flaw
Smote them and us; but nothing would avail
To mend the thing, so onward did we sail,
But slowly, through the moonlit night and fair.

With all sails set that we could hoist in air,
And rolling heavily at first, for still
Each wave came on a glittering rippled hill,
And lifting us aloft, showed from its height
The waste of waves, and then to lightless night
Dropped us adown, and much ado had we
To ride unspilt the wallow of the sea.
But the sun rose up in a cloudless sky,
And from the east the wind blew cheerily,
And southwest still we steered; till on a day
As nigh the mast deep in dull thoughts I lay,
I heard a shout, and turning could I see
One of the shipmen hurrying fast to me
With something in his hand, who cast adown
Close to my hand a mass of sea-weed brown
Without more words, then knew I certainly
The wrack, that oft before I had seen lie
In sandy bights of Norway, and that eve
Just as the sun the ridgy sea would leave,
Shore birds we saw, that flew so nigh, we heard
Their hoarse loud voice that seemed a heavenly word.
Then all were glad, but I a fool and young
Slept not that night, but walked the deck and sung
Snatches of songs, and verily I think
I thought next morn of some fresh stream to drink.
What say I? next morn did I think to be
Set in my godless fair eternity.

Sirs, ye are old, and ye have seen perchance

Some little child for very gladness dance
Over a scarcely-noticed worthless thing,
Worth more to him than ransom of a king,
Did not a pang of more than pity take
Your heart thereat, not for the youngling's sake,
But for your own, for man that passes by,
So like to God, so like the beasts that die.—
Lo, sirs, my pity for myself is such,
When like an image that my hand can touch
My old self grows unto myself grown old.
—Sirs, I forget my story is not told.

Next morn more wrack we saw, more birds, but still
No land as yet either for good or ill,
But with the light increased the favouring breeze,
And smoothly did we mount the ridgy seas.
Then as a-nigh the good ship's stern I stood
Gazing adown, a piece of rough-hewn wood
On a wave's crest I saw, and loud I cried,
"Drift-wood! drift-wood!" and one from by my side,
Maddened with joy, made for the shrouds, and clomb
Up to the top to look on his new home,
For sure he thought the green earth soon to see;
But gazing thence about him, presently
He shouted out, "a sail astern, a sail!"
Freshening the hope that now had 'gun to fail
Of seeing our fellows with the earth new found;
Wherefore we shortened sail, and sweeping round
The hazy edges of the sea and sky

Soon from the deck could see that sail draw nigh,
Half fearful lest she yet might chance to be
The floating house of some strange enemy,
Till on her sail we could at last behold
The ruddy lion with the axe of gold,
And Marcus Erling's sign set corner-wise,
The green, gold-fruited tree of Paradise.
— Ah, what a meeting as she drew anigh,
Greeted with ringing shouts and minstrelsy;
Alas, the joyful fever of that day,
When all we met still told of land that lay
Not far ahead! Yet at our joyous feast
A word of warning spoke the Swabian priest
To me and Nicholas, for, "O friends," he said,
"Right welcome is the land that lies ahead
To us who cannot turn, and in this air,
Washed by this sea, it cannot but be fair,
And good for us poor men I make no doubt;
Yet, fellows, must I warn you not to shout
Ere we have left the troublous wood behind
Wherein we wander desperate and blind:
Think what may dwell there! Call to mind the tale
We heard last winter o'er the Yule-tide ale,
When that small, withered, black-eyed Genoese
Told of the island in the outer seas
He and his fellows reached upon a tide,
And how, as lying by a streamlet's side,
With ripe fruits ready unto every hand,
They lacked not for fair women of the land,

The devils came and slew them, all but him,
Who, how he scarce knew, made a shift to swim
Off to his ship: nor must ye, fellows, fear
Such things alone, for mayhap men dwell here
Who worship dreadful gods, and sacrifice
Poor travellers to them in such horrid wise
As I have heard of; or let this go by,
Yet we may chance to come to slavery,
Or all our strength and weapons be too poor
To conquer such beasts as the unknown shore
May breed; or set all these ill things aside,
It yet may be our lot to wander wide
Through many lands before at last we come
Unto the gates of our enduring home."

But what availed such warning unto us
Who by this change made nigh delirious
Spake wisdom outward from the teeth, but thought
That in a little hour we should be brought
Unto that bliss our hearts were set upon,
That more than very Heaven we now had won.

Well, the next morn unto our land we came,
And even now my cheeks grow red with shame,
To think what words I said to Nicholas,
(Since on that night in the great ship I was,)
Asking him questions, as if he were God,
Or at the least in that fair land had trod,
And knew it well, and still he answered me

As some great doctor in theology
Might his poor scholar, asking him of heaven.
But unto me next morn the grace was given
To see land first, and when men certainly
That blessed sight of all sights could descry,
All hearts were melted, and with happy tears,
Born of the death of all our doubts and fears,
Yea, with loud weeping, each did each embrace
For joy that we had gained the glorious place.
Then must the minstrels sing, then must they play
Some joyous strain to welcome in the day,
But for hot tears could see nor bow nor string,
Nor for the rising sobs make shift to sing;
Yea, some of us in that first ecstasy
For joy of 'scaping death went near to die.
Then might be seen how hard is this world's lot
When such a marvel was our grief forgot,
And what a thing the world's joy is to bear,
When on our hearts the broken bonds of care
Had left such scars, no man of us could say
The burning words upon his lips that lay;
Since, trained to hide the depths of misery,
Amidst that joy no more our tongues were free.
Ah, then it was indeed when first I knew,
When all our wildest dreams seemed coming true,
And we had reached the gates of Paradise
And endless bliss, at what unmeasured price
Man sets his life, and drawing happy breath,
I shuddered at the once familiar death.

Alas, the happy day! the foolish day!
Alas, the sweet time, too soon passed away!

Well, in a while I gained the Rose Garland,
And as toward shore we steadily did stand
With all sail set, the wind, which had been light,
Since the beginning of the just past night,
Failed utterly, and the sharp ripple slept,
Then toiling hard forward our keels we swept,
Making small way, until night fell again,
And then, although of landing we were fain,
Needs must we wait, but when the sun was set
Then the cool night a light air did beget,
And 'neath the stars slowly we moved along,
And found ourselves within a current strong
At daybreak, and the land beneath our lee.
There a long line of breakers could we see,
That on a yellow sandy beach did fall,
And then a belt of grass, and then a wall
Of green trees, rising dark against the sky.
Not long we looked, but anchored presently
A furlong from the shore, and then, all armed,
Into the boats the most part of us swarmed,
And pulled with eager hands unto the beach,
But when the seething surf our prow did reach
From off the bows I leapt into the sea
Waist deep, and, wading, was the first to be
Upon that land; then to the flowers I ran,
And cried aloud like to a drunken man

Words without meaning, whereof none took heed,
For all across the yellow beach made speed
To roll among the fair flowers and the grass.
But when our folly somewhat tempered was,
And we could talk like men, we thought it good
To try if we could pierce the thick black wood,
And see what men might dwell in that new land;
But when we entered it, on either hand
Uprose the trunks, with underwood entwined
Making one thicket, thorny, dense, and blind;
Where with our axes, labouring half the day,
We scarcely made some half a rod of way;
Therefore, we left that place and tried again,
Yea, many times, but yet was all in vain;
So to the ships we went, when we had been
A long way in our arms, nor yet had seen
A sign of man, but as for living things,
Gay birds with many-coloured crests and wings,
Conies anigh the beach, and while we hacked
Within the wood, grey serpents, yellow-backed,
And monstrous lizards; yea, and one man said
That 'midst the thorns he saw a dragon's head;
And keeping still his eyes on it he felt
For a stout shaft he had within his belt;
But just as he had got it to the string
And drawn his hand aback, the loathly thing
Vanished away, and how he could not tell.

Now spite of all, little our courage fell,

For this day's work, nay rather, all things seemed
To show that we no foolish dream had dreamed—
The pathless, fearful sea, the land that lay
So strange, so hard to find, so far away,
The lovely summer air, the while we knew
That unto winter now at home it grew,
The flowery shore, the dragon-guarded wood,
So hard to pierce—each one of these made good
The foolish hope that led us from our home,
That we to utter misery might come.

Now next morn when the tide began to flow
We weighed, and somewhat northward did we go
Coasting that land, and every now and then
We went ashore to try the woods again,
But little change we found in them, until
Inland we saw a bare and scarped white hill
Rise o'er their tops, and going further on
Unto a broad green river's mouth we won,
And entering there, ran up it with the flood,
For it was deep although 'twixt walls of wood
Darkly enough its shaded stream did flow,
And high trees hid the hill we saw just now.

So as we peered about from side to side
A path upon the right bank we espied
Through the thick wood, and mooring hastily
Our ships unto the trunks of trees thereby,
Laurence and I with sixty men took land
With bow or cutting sword or bill in hand,

And bearing food to last till the third day;
But with the others there did Nicholas stay
To guard the ships, with whom was Kirstin still,
Who now seemed pining for old things, and ill,
Spite of the sea-breeze and the lovely air.

But as for us, we followed up with care
A winding path, looking from left to right
Lest any deadly thing should come in sight;
And certainly our path a dragon crossed
That in the thicket presently we lost;
And some men said a leopard they espied,
And further on we heard a beast that cried;
Serpents we saw, like those we erst had seen,
And many-coloured birds, and lizards green,
And apes that chattered from amidst the trees.

So on we went until a dying breeze
We felt upon our faces, and soon grew
The forest thinner, till at last we knew
The great scarped hill, which if we now could scale
For sight of much far country would avail;
But coming there we climbed it easily,
For though escarped and rough toward the sea,
The beaten path we followed led us round
To where a soft and grassy slope we found,
And there it forked, one arm led up the hill
Another through the forest wound on still;
Which last we left, in good hope soon to see
Some signs of man, which happened presently;
For two-thirds up the hill we reached a space

Levelled by man's hand in the mountain's face,
And there a rude shrine stood, of unhewn stones
Both walls and roof, with a great heap of bones
Piled up outside it: there awhile we stood
In doubt, for something there made cold our blood,
Till brother Laurence, with a whispered word,
Crossed himself thrice, and drawing forth his sword
Entered alone, but therewith presently
From the inside called out aloud to me
To follow, so I trembling, yet went in
To that abode of unknown monstrous sin,
And others followed: therein could we see,
Amidst the gloom by peering steadily,
An altar of rough stones, and over it
We saw a god of yellow metal sit,
A cubit long, which Laurence with his tongue
Had touched and found pure gold; withal there hung
Against the wall men's bodies brown and dry,
Which gaudy rags of raiment wretchedly
Did wrap about, and all their heads were wreathed
With golden chaplets; and meanwhile we breathed
A heavy, faint, and sweet spice-laden air,
As though that incense late were scattered there.
But from that house of devils soon we passed
Trembling and pale, Laurence the priest, the last,
And got away in haste, nor durst we take
Those golden chaplets for their wearers' sake,
Or that grim golden devil whose they were;
Yet for the rest, although they brought us fear

They did but seem to show our heaven anigh
Because we deemed these might have come to die
In seeking it, being slain for fatal sin.
And now we set ourselves in haste to win
Up to that mountain's top, and on the way
Looked backward oft upon the land that lay
Beneath the hill, and still on every hand
The forest seemed to cover all the land,
But that some four leagues off we saw a space
Cleared of the trees, and in that open place
Houses we seemed to see, and rising smoke
That told where dwelt the unknown, unseen folk.
But when at last the utmost top we won
A dismal sight our eyes must look upon;
The mountain's summit, levelled by man's art,
Was hedged by high stones set some yard apart
All round a smooth paved space, and midst of these
We saw a group of well-wrought images,
Or so they seemed at first, who stood around
An old hoar man laid on the rocky ground
Who seemed to live as yet; now drawing near
We saw indeed what things these figures were;
Dead corpses, by some deft embalmer dried,
And on this mountain after they had died
Set up like players on a yule-tide feast;
Here stood a hunter, with a spotted beast
Most like a leopard, writhing up his spear;
Nigh the old man stood one as if drawn near
To give him drink, and on each side his head

Two damsels daintily apparelled;
And then again, nigh him who bore the cup,
Were two who 'twixt them bore a litter up
As though upon a journey he should go,
And round about stood men with spear and bow,
And painted targets as the guard to all,
Headed by one beyond man's stature tall,
Who, half turned round, as though he gave the word,
Seemed as he once had been a mighty lord.
But the live man amid the corpses laid,
Turning from side to side, some faint word said
Now and again, but kept his eyes shut fast,
And we when from the green slope we had passed
On to this dreadful stage, awe-struck and scared,
Awhile upon the ghastly puppets stared,
Then trembling, with drawn swords, came close anigh
To where the hapless ancient man did lie,
Who at the noise we made now oped his eyes
And fixing them upon us did uprise,
And with a fearful scream stretched out his hand,
While upright on his head his hair did stand
For very terror, while we none the less
Were rooted to the ground for fearfulness,
And scarce our weapons could make shift to hold.
But as we stood and gazed, over he rolled
Like a death-stricken bull, and there he lay,
With his long-hoarded life quite past away.
Then in our hearts did wonder conquer fear,
And to the dead men did we draw anear

And found them such-like things as I have said,
But he, their master, was apparelled
Like to those others that we saw e'en now
Hung up within the dreary house below.

Right little courage had we there to stay,
So down the hill again we took our way,
When looking landward thence we had but seen,
All round about, the forest dull and green,
Pierced by the river where our ships we left,
And bounded by far-off blue mountains, cleft
By passes here and there; but we went by
The chapel of the gold god silently,
For doubts had risen in our hearts at last
If yet the bitterness of death were past.
But having come again into the wood,
We there took council whether it were good
To turn back to the ships, or push on still
Till we had reached the place that from the hill
We had beheld, and since the last seemed best
Onward we marched, scarce staying to take rest
And eat some food, for feverish did we grow
For haste the best or worst of all to know.
Along the path that, as I said before,
Led from the hill, we went, and laboured sore
To gain the open ere the night should fall,
But yet in vain, for like a dreary pall
Cast o'er the world, the darkness hemmed us in,
And though we struggled desperately to win

From out the forest through the very night,
Yet did that labour so abate our might,
We thought it good to rest among the trees,
Nor come on those who might be enemies
In the thick darkness, neither did we dare
To light a fire lest folk should slay us there
Mazed and defenceless; so the one half slept
As they might do, the while the others kept
Good guard in turn; and as we watched we heard
Sounds that might well have made bold men afeard,
And cowards die of fear, but we, alone,
Apart from all, such desperate men were grown,
If we should fail to win our Paradise,
That common life we now might well despise.
So by the day-break on our way we were
When we had seen to all our fighting gear;
And soon we came unto that open space,
And here and there about a grassy place
Saw houses scattered, neither great nor fair,
For they were framed of trees as they grew there,
And walled with wattle-work from tree to tree;
And thereabout beasts unknown did we see,
Four-footed, tame; and soon a man came out
From the first house, and with a startled shout
Took to his heels, and soon from far and near,
The folk swarmed out, and still as in great fear
Gave us no second look, but ran their best,
And they being clad but lightly for the rest,
To follow them seemed little mastery.

So to their houses gat we speedily
To see if we might take some loiterer;
And some few feeble folk we did find there,
Though most had fled, and unto these with pain
We made some little of our meaning plain,
And sent an old man forth into the wood
To show his fellows that our will was good.
Who going from us came back presently
His message done, and with him two or three
The boldest of his folk, and they in turn
A little of us by our signs did learn,
Then went their way: and so at last all fear
Was laid aside, and thronging they drew near
To look upon us; and at last came one
Who had upon his breast a golden sun,
And in strange glittering gay attire was clad;
He let us know our coming made him glad,
And bade us come with him; so thereon we,
Thinking him some one in authority,
Rose up and followed him, who with glad face
Led us through closer streets of that strange place,
And brought us lastly to a shapely hall
Round and high-roofed, held up with tree trunks tall,
And midst his lords the barbarous king sat there,
Gold-crowned, in strange apparel rich and fair,
Whereat we shuddered, for we saw that he
Was clad like him that erewhile we did see
Upon the hill, and like those other ones
Hung in the dismal shrine of unhewn stones.

Yet nought of evil did he seem to think,
But bade us sit by him and eat and drink,
So eating did we speak by signs meanwhile
Each unto each, and they would laugh and smile
As folk well-pleased; and with them all that day
Well feasted, learning some things did we stay.
And sure of all the folk I ever saw
These were the gentlest: if they had a law
We knew not then, but still they seemed to be
Like the gold people of antiquity.

Now when we tried to ask for that good land,
Eastward and seaward did they point the hand;
Yet if they knew what thing we meant thereby
We knew not; but when we for our reply
Said that we came thence, they made signs to say
They knew it well, and kneeling down they lay
Before our feet, as people worshipping.

But we, though somewhat troubled at this thing,
Failed not to hope, because it seemed to us
That this so simple folk and virtuous,
So happy midst their dreary forest bowers,
Showed at the least a better land than ours,
And some yet better thing far onward lay.

Amidst all this we made a shift to pray
That some of them would go with us, to be
Our fellows on the perilous green sea,
And much did they rejoice when this they knew,
And straightway midst their young men lots they drew,
And the next morn of these they gave us ten,

And wept at our departing.

Now these men,
Though brown indeed through dint of that hot sun,
Were comely and well-knit, as any one
I saw in Greece, and fit for deeds of war,
Though as I said of all men gentlest far;
Their arms were axe and spear, and shield and bow,
But nought of iron did they seem to know,
For all their cutting tools were edged with flint,
Or with soft copper, that soon turned and bent;
With cloths of cotton were their bodies clad,
But other raiment for delight they had
Most fairly woven of some unknown thing;
And all of them from little child to king
Had many ornaments of beaten gold:
Certes, we might have gathered wealth untold
Amongst them, had that then been in our thought,
But none the glittering evil valued aught.

Now of these foresters, we learned, that they
Hemmed by the woods, went seldom a long way
From where we saw them, and no boat they had,
Or much of other people good or bad
They knew, and ever had they little war:
But now and then a folk would come from far
In ships unlike to ours, and for their gold
Would give them goods; and some men over bold
Who dwelt beyond the great hill we had seen,
Had waged them war, but these all slain had been
Among the tangled woods by men who knew

What tracks of beasts the thicket might pierce through.
Such things they told us whom we brought away,
But after this, for certes on that day
Not much we gathered of their way of life.
So to the ships we came at last, and rife
With many things new learned, we told them all,
And though our courage might begin to fall
A little now, yet each to other we
Made countenance of great felicity,
And spoke as if the prize were well-nigh won.

Behold then, sirs, how fortune led us on,
Little by little till we reached the worst,
And still our lives grew more and more accurst.

THE ELDER OF THE CITY.

Nay, friends, believe your worser life now past,
And that a little bliss is reached at last;
Take heart, therefore, for like a tale so told
Is each man's life: and ye, who have been bold
To see and suffer such unheard-of things,
Henceforth shall be more worshipped than the kings
We hear you name; then since ye reach this day
How are ye worse for what has passed away?

THE WANDERER.

Kind folk, what words of ours can give you praise
That fits your kindness; yet for those past days,

If we bemoan our lot, think this at least:
We are as men, who cast aside a feast
Amidst their lowly fellows, that they may
Eat with the king, and who at end of day,
Bearing sore stripes, with great humility
Must pray the bedesmen of those men to be
They scorned that day while yet the sun was high.

Not long within the river did we lie,
But put to sea intending as before
To coast with watchful eyes the unknown shore,
And strive to pierce the woods: three days we sailed,
And little all our watchfulness availed,
Though all that time the wind was fair enow;
But on the fourth day it began to blow
From off the land, and still increased on us
Until the storm grown wild and furious,
Although at anchor still we strove to ride,
Had blown us out into the ocean wide,
Far out of sight of land; and when at last,
After three days, its fury was o'erpast,
Of all our counsels this one was the best
To beat back blindly to the longed-for west;
Baffling the wind was, toilsome was the way,
Nor did we make land till the thirtieth day,
When both flesh-meat and water were nigh spent,
But anchoring at last, ashore we went,
And found the land far better than the first.
For this with no thick forest was accurst,

Though here and there were scattered clumps of wood.
The air was cooler, too, but soft and good,
Fair streams we saw, and herds of goats and deer,
But nothing noisome for a man to fear.
So since at anchor safe our good ships lay
Within the long horns of a sandy bay,
We thought it good ashore to take our ease,
And pitched our tents anigh some maple-trees
Not far from shore, and there with little pain
Enough of venison quickly did we gain
To feast us all, and high feast did we hold
Lighting great fires, for now the nights were cold,
And we were fain a noble roast to eat;
Nor did we lack for drink to better meat,
For from the dark hold of the Rose Garland
A well-hooped cask our shipmen brought aland,
That knew some white-walled city of the Rhine.
There crowned with flowers, and flushed with noble wine,
Hearkening the distant murmur of the main,
And safe upon our promised land again,
What wonder if our vain hopes rose once more
And Heaven seemed dull beside that twice-won shore.
By midnight in our tents were we asleep,
And little watch that night did any keep,
For as our pleasance that fair land we deemed.
But in my sleep of lovely things I dreamed,
For I was back at Micklegarth once more,
But not a court-man's son there as of yore,

But the Greek king, or so I seemed to be,
Set on the throne whose awe and majesty
Gold lions guard; before whose moveless feet
A damsel knelt, praying in words so sweet
For what I know not now, that both mine eyes
Grew full of tears, and I must bid her rise
And sit beside me; step by step she came
Up the gold stair, setting my heart a-flame
With all her beauty, till she reached the throne
And there sat down, but as with her alone
In that vast hall, my hand her hand did seek,
And on my face I felt her balmy cheek,
Throughout my heart there shot a dreadful pang,
And down below us, with a sudden clang
The golden lions rose, and roared aloud,
And in at every door did armed men crowd,
Shouting out death and curses, and I fell
Dreaming indeed that this at last was hell.

But therewithal I woke, and through the night
Heard shrieks and shouts and clamour as of fight,
And snatching up my axe, unarmed beside
Nor scarce awaked, my rallying cry I cried,
And with good haste unto the hubbub went;
But even in the entry of the tent
Some dark mass hid the star-besprinkled sky,
And whistling past my head a spear did fly,
And striking out I saw a naked man
Fall 'neath my blow, nor heeded him, but ran

Unto the captain's tent, for there indeed
I saw my fellows stand at desperate need,
Beset with foes, nor yet armed more than I,
Though on the way I rallied hastily
Some better armed, with whom I straightway fell
Upon the foe, who with a hideous yell
Turned round upon us; but we desperate
And fresh, and dangerous for our axes' weight,
Fought so that they must needs give back a pace
And yield our fellows some small breathing space;
Then gathering all together, side by side
We laid our weapons, and our cries we cried
And rushed upon them, who abode no more
Our levelled points, but scattering from the shore
Ran here and there, but when some two or three
We in the chase had slain right easily,
We held our hands, nor followed more their flight,
Fearing the many chances of the night.

Then did we light our watch-fires up again
And armed us all, and found three good men slain;
Ten wounded, among whom was Nicholas,
Though little heedful of these things he was,
For in his tent he sat upon the ground,
Holding fair Kirstin's hand, whom he had found
Dead, with a feathered javelin in her breast.

But taking counsel now, we thought it best
To gather up our goods and get away
Unto the ships, and there to wait the day;
Nor did we loiter, fearful lest the foe,

Who somewhat now our feebleness must know,
Should come on us with force made manifold,
And all our story quickly should be told.
So to our boats in haste the others gat,
But in his tent, not speaking, Nicholas sat,
Nor moved when o'er his head we struck the tent.
But when all things were ready, then I went
And raised the body up, and silently
Walked with it down the beach unto the sea;
Then he arose and followed me, and when
He reached at last the now embarking men,
And in a boat my burden I had laid,
He sat beside; but no word had he said
Since first he knew her slain. Such ending had
The night at whose beginning all were glad.

One wounded man of theirs we brought with us
Hoping for news, but he grew furious
When he awoke aboard from out his swoon,
And tore his wounds, and smote himself, and soon
Died outright, though his hurts were slight enow,
So nought from him of that land could we know.
But now as we that luckless country scanned,
Just at the daybreak did we see a band
Of these barbarians come with shout and yell
Across the place where all these things befell,
Down to the very edges of the sea;
But though armed now, by day, we easily
Had made a shift no few of them to slay,

It seemed to us the better course to weigh
And try another entry to that land;
So southward with a light wind did we stand,
Not losing sight of shore, and now and then
I led ashore the more part of our men
Well armed, by daylight, and the barbarous folk
Once and again from bushments on us broke,
Whom without loss of men we brushed away.
But in our turn it happed to us one day
Upon a knot of them unwares to come,
These we bore back with us, the most of whom
Would neither eat nor drink, but sullenly
Sat in a corner of the ship to die;
But 'mongst them was a woman, who at last,
Won by the glitter of some toy we cast
About her neck, by soft words and by wine,
Began to answer us by sign to sign;
Of whom we learned not much indeed, but when
We set on shore those tameless savage men,
And would have left her too, she seemed to pray,
For terror of her folk, with us to stay:
Therefore we took her back with us, and she,
Though learning not our tongue too easily,
Unto the forest-folk began to speak.

Now midst all this passed many a weary week,
And we no nigher all the time had come
Unto the portal of our blissful home,
And needs our bright hope somewhat must decay;

Yet none the less as dull day passed by day,
Still onward by our folly were we led,
And still with lies our wavering hearts we fed.
Happy we were in this, that still the wind
Blew as we wished, and still the air was kind;
Nor failed we of fresh water as we went
Along the coast, and oft our bows we bent
On beast and fowl, and had no lack of food.
Upon a day it chanced, that as we stood
Somewhat off shore to fetch about a ness,
Although the wind was blowing less and less,
We were entrapped into a fearful sea,
And carried by a current furiously
Away from shore, and there were we so tost
That for awhile we deemed ourselves but lost
Amid those tumbling waves; but now at last,
When out of sight of land we long had passed,
The sea fell, and again toward land we stood,
Which, reached upon the tenth day, seemed right good,
But still untilled, and mountains rose up high
Far inland, mingling with the cloudy sky.
Once more we took the land, and since we found
That, more than ever, beasts did there abound,
We pitched our camp beside a little stream,
But scarcely there of Paradise did dream
As heretofore. Our camp we fortified
With wall and dyke, and then the land we tried,
And found the people most untaught and wild,
Nigh void of arts, but harmless, good, and mild,

Nor fearing us: with some of these we went
Back to our camp and people, with intent
To question them, by her we last had got.
But when she heard their tongue she knew it not,
Nor did those others: but they seemed to say,
That o'er the mountains other lands there lay
Where folk dwelt, clothed and armed like unto us,
But made withal as they were timorous
And feared them much. Then we made signs that we,
So little feared by all that tumbling sea,
Would go to seek them; but they still would stay
Our journey; nathless what they meant to say
We scarce knew yet: howbeit, since these men
Were friendly, and the weather, which till then
Had been most fair, now grew to storm and rain,
And the wind blew on land, and not in vain
To us poor fools, that tale, half understood
Those folk had told: midst all, we thought it good
To haul our ships ashore, and build us there
A place where we might dwell, till we could fare
Along the coast, or inland it might be,
That fertile realm, those goodly men to see.

Right foul the weather was a dreary space
While we abode with people of that place,
And built them huts, as well we could, for we
Who dwell in Norway have great mastery
In woodwright's craft; but they in turn would bring
Wild fruits to us, and many a woodland thing,
And catch us fish, and show us how to take

The smaller beasts, and meanwhile for our sake
They learned our tongue, and we too somewhat learned
Of words of theirs; but day by day we yearned
To cross those mountains, and I woke no morn,
To find myself lost, wretched, and forlorn,
But those far-off white summits gave me heart;
Now too those folk their story could impart
Concerning them, and that in short was this—
—Beyond them lay a fair abode of bliss
Where dwelt men like the Gods, and clad as we,
Who doubtless lived on through eternity
Unless the very world should come to nought;
But never had they had the impious thought
To scale those mountains, since most surely, none
Could follow over them the fearful sun
And live, of men they knew; but as for us
They said, who were so wise and glorious
It might not be so.

Thus they spoke one eve
When the black rain-clouds for a while did leave
Upon the fresh and teeming earth to frown,
And we they spoke to, had just set us down
Midmost their village: from the resting earth
Sweet odours rose, and in their noisy mirth
The women played, as rising from the brook
Off their long locks the glittering drops they shook;
Betwixt the huts the children raced along;
Some man was singing a wild barbarous song
Anigh us, and these folk possessing nought,

And lacking nought, lived happy, free from thought,
Or so it seemed—but we, what thing could pay
For all that we had left so far away?
Such thoughts as these I uttered murmuringly,
But lifting up mine eyes, against the sky
Beheld the snowy peaks brought near to us
By a strange sunset, red and glorious,
That seemed as through the much-praised land it lit,
And would do, long hours after we must sit
Beneath the twinkling stars with none to heed:
And though I knew it was not so indeed,
Yet did it seem to answer me, as though
It called us once more on our quest to go.
Then springing up I raised my voice and said,—
"What is it fellows, fear ye to be dead
Upon those peaks, when, if ye loiter here
Half dead, with very death still drawing near,
Your lives are wasted all the more for this,
That ye in this world thought to garner bliss;
Unless indeed ye chance to think it well
With this unclad and barbarous folk to dwell,
Deedless and hopeless; ye, to whom the land,
That o'er the world has sent so many a band
Of conquering men, was not yet good enough.
"Did ye then deem the way would not be rough
Unto the lovely land ye so desire?
Did ye not rather swear through blood and fire,
And all ill things to follow up this quest
Till life or death your longing laid to rest?

"Let us not linger here then, until fate
Make longing unavailing, hope too late,
And turn to lamentations all our prayers,
But with to-morrow cast aside your cares,
And stout of heart make ready for the strife
'Twixt this short time of dreaming and real life.
"Lo now, if but the half will come with me,
The summit of those mountains will I see,
Or, else die first, yea, if but twenty men
Will follow me; nor will I stay if ten
Will share my trouble or felicity—
What do I say? alone, O friends, will I
Seek for my life, for no man can die twice,
And death or life may give me Paradise!"

Then Nicholas said, "Rolf, I will go with thee,
For desperate do I think the quest to be,
And I shall die, and that to me is well,
Or else I may forget, I cannot tell—
Still I will go."
Then Laurence said, "I too
Will go remembering what I said to you,
When any land, the first to which we came
Seemed that we sought, and set your hearts aflame,
And all seemed won to you: but still I think,
Perchance years hence, the fount of life to drink,
Unless by some ill chance I first am slain,
But boundless risk must pay for boundless gain."
So most men said, but yet a few there were

Who said, "Nay, soothly let us live on here,
We have been fools and we must pay therefore
With this dull life, and labour very sore
Until we die; yet are we grown too wise
Upon this earth to seek for Paradise;
Leave us, but ye may yet come back again
When ye have found your trouble nought and vain."

Well, in three days we left those men behind,
To dwell among the simple folk and kind
Who were our guides at first, until that we
Reached the green hills clustered confusedly
About the mountains, then they turned, right glad
That till that time no horrors they had had;
But we still hopeful, making nought of time,
The rugged rocks now set ourselves to climb,
And lonely there for days and days and days
We stumbled through the blind and bitter ways,
Now rising to the never-melting snow,
Now beaten thence, and fain to try below
Another kingdom of that world of stone.

At last when all our means of life were gone
And some of us had fallen in the fight
With cold and weariness, we came in sight
Of what we hungered for—what then—what then?
—A savage land, a land untilled again,
No lack of food while lasted shaft or bow,
But folk the worst of all we came to know;
Scarce like to men, yea, worse than most of beasts,

For of men slain they made their impious feasts;
These, as I deem for our fresh blood athirst
From out the thick wood often on us burst.
Not heeding death, and in confused fight
We spent full many a wretched day and night,
That yet were happiest of the times we knew,
For with our grief such fearful foes we grew,
That Odin's gods had hardly scared men more
As fearless through the naked press we bore.

At first indeed some prisoners did we take,
Asking them questions for our fair land's sake,
Hoping 'gainst hope; but when in vain had been
Our questioning, and we one day had seen
Their way of banqueting, then axe and spear
Ended the wretched life and sullen fear
Of any wild man wounded in the fight.

So with the failing of our hoped delight
We grew to be like devils—then I knew
At my own cost, what each man cometh to
When every pleasure from his life is gone,
And hunger and desire of life alone,
That still beget dull rage and bestial fears,
Like gnawing serpents through the world he bears.

What time we spent there? nay, I do not know:
For happy folk no time can pass too slow
Because they die; because at last they die
And are at rest, no time too fast can fly
For wretches; but eternity of woe
Had hemmed us in, and neither fast or slow

Passed the dull time as we held reckoning.
Yet midst so many a wretched, hopeless thing
One hope there was, if it was still a hope,
At last, at last, to turn, and scale the cope
Of those dread mountains we had clambered o'er.
And we did turn, and with what labour sore,
What thirst, what hunger, and what wretchedness
We struggled daily, how can words express?
Yet amidst all, the kind God led us on
Until at last a high raised pass we won
And like grey clouds afar beheld the sea,
And weakened with our toil and misery
Wept at that sight, that like a friend did seem
Forgotten long, beheld but in a dream
When we know not if he be still alive.
But thence descending, we with rocks did strive,
Till dwindled, weary, did we reach the plain
And came unto our untaught friends again,
And those we left, who yet alive and well,
Wedded to brown wives, fain would have us tell
The story of our woes, which when they heard,
The country people wondered at our word,
But not our fellows; and so all being said
A little there we gathered lustihead
Still talking over what was best to do.
And we the leaders yet were fain to go
From sea to sea and take what God might send,
Who at the worst our hopes and griefs would end
With that same death we once had hoped to stay,

Or even yet might send us such a day,
That our past troubles should but make us glad
As men rejoice in pensive songs and sad.
This was our counsel; those that we had left
Said, that they once before had been bereft
Of friends and country by a sick man's dream,
That this their life not evil did they deem
Nor would they rashly cast it down the wind;
But whoso went, that they would stay behind.
Others there were who said, whate'er might come
They would at least seek for the happy home
They had forgotten once, and there at last
In penitence for sins and follies past
Wait for the death that they in vain had fled.

Well, when all things by all sides had been said
We drew the ships again unto the sea,
Which those who went not with us, carefully
Had tended for those years we were away
(Which still they said was ten months and a day);
And these we rigged, and in a little while
The Fighting Man looked o'er the false sea's smile
Unto the land of Norway, and our band
Across the bulwarks of the Rose Garland,
Amidst of tears and doubt and misery
Sent after them a feeble farewell cry,
And they returned a tremulous faint cheer,
While from the sandy shell-strewn beach anear
The soft west wind across the waves bore out

A strange confused noise of wail and shout,
For there the dark line of the outland folk
A few familiar grey-eyed faces broke,
That minded us of Norway left astern,
Ere we began our heavy task to learn.

THE ELDER OF THE CITY.

Sirs, by my deeming had ye still gone on
When ye had crossed the mountains, ye had won
Unto another sea at last, and there
Had found clad folk, and cities great and fair
Though not the deathless country of your thought.

THE WANDERER.

Yea, sirs, and short of that we had deemed nought,
Ere yet our hope of life had fully died,
And for those cities scarce should we have tried,
E'en had we known of them, and certainly
Nought but those bestial people did we see:
But let me hasten now unto the end.

Fair wind and lovely weather God did send
To us deserted men, who but two score
Now mustered, so we stood off from the shore
Still stretching south till we lost land again,
Because we deemed our labour would be vain
Upon the land too near where we had been,
Where none of us as yet a sign had seen
Of that which we desired. And now we few,

Thus left alone, each unto other grew
The dearer friends, and less accursed we seemed
As still the less of 'scaping death we dreamed,
And knew the lot of all men should be ours,
A chequered day of sunshine and of showers
Fading to twilight and dark night at last.
Those forest folk with ours their lot had cast,
And ever unto us were leal and true,
And now when all our tongue at last they knew
They told us tales, too long to tell as now;
Yet this one thing I fain to you would show
About the dying man our sight did kill
Amidst the corpses on that dreary hill:
Namely, that when their king drew nigh to death,
But still had left in him some little breath,
They bore him to that hill, when they had slain,
By a wild root that killed with little pain,
His servants and his wives like as we saw,
Thinking that thence the gods his soul would draw
To heaven; but the king being dead at last,
The servants dead being taken down, they cast
Into the river, but the king they hung
Embalmed within that chapel, where they sung
Some office over him in solemn wise,
Amidst the smoke of plenteous sacrifice.

Well, though wild hope no longer in us burned,
Unto the land within a while we turned,
And found it much the same, and still untilled,

And still its people of all arts unskilled;
And some were dangerous and some were kind;
But midst them no more tidings did we find
Of what we once had deemed well-won, but now
Was like the dream of some past kingly show.
What shall I say of all these savages,
Of these wide plains beset with unsown trees,
Through which untamed man-fearing beasts did range?
To us at least there seemed but little change,
For we were growing weary of the world.
Whiles did we dwell ashore, whiles were we hurled
Out to the landless ocean, whiles we lay
Long time within some river or deep bay;
And so the months went by, until at last,
When now three years were fully overpast
Since we had left our fellows, and grown old
Our leaky ship along the water rolled,
Upon a day unto a land we came
Whose people spoke a tongue well-nigh the same
As that our forest people used, and who
A little of the arts of mankind knew,
And tilled the kind earth, certes not in vain;
For wealth of melons we saw there, and grain
Strange unto us. Now battered as we were,
Grown old before our time, in worn-out gear,
These people, when we first set foot ashore,
Garlands of flowers and fruits unto us bore,
And worshipped us as gods, and for no words
That we could say would cease to call us Lords,

And pray our help to give them bliss and peace,
And fruitful seasons of the earth's increase.
Withal at last, they, when in talk they fell
With our good forest-folk, to them did tell
That they were subject to a mighty king,
Who, as they said, ruled over everything,
And, dwelling in a glorious city, had
All things that men desire to make them glad.
"He," said they, "none the less shall be but slave
Unto your lords, and all that he may have
Will he but take as free gifts at their hands,
If they will deign henceforth to bless his lands
With their most godlike presence."
Ye can think
How we poor wretched souls outworn might shrink
From such strange worship, that like mocking seemed
To us, who of a godlike state had dreamed,
And missed it in such wise; yet none the less
An earthly haven to our wretchedness
This city seemed, therefore we 'gan to pray
That some of them would guide us on our way,
Which words of ours they heard most joyously,
And brought us to their houses nigh the sea,
And feasted us with such things as they might.
But almost ere the ending of the night
We started on our journey, being up-borne
In litters, like to kings, who so forlorn
Had been erewhile; so in some ten days' space
They brought us nigh their king's abiding place;

And as we went the land seemed fair enough,
Though sometimes did we pass through forests rough,
Deserts and fens, yet for the most, the way
Through ordered villages and tilled land lay,
Which after all the squalid miseries
We had beheld, seemed heaven unto our eyes,
Though strange to us it was.
But now when we
From a hill-side the city well could see,
Our guides there prayed us to abide awhile,
Wherefore we stayed, though eager to beguile
Our downcast hearts from brooding o'er our woe
By all the new things that abode might show;
So while we bided on that flowery down
The swiftest of them sped on toward the town
To bear them news of this unhoped-for bliss;
And we, who now some little happiness
Could find in that fair place and pleasant air,
Sat 'neath strange trees, on new flowers growing there
Of scent unlike to those we knew of old,
While unfamiliar tales the strange birds told.
But certes seemed that city fair enow
That spread out o'er the well-tilled vale below,
Though nowise built like such as we had seen;
Walled with white walls it was, and gardens green
Were set between the houses everywhere;
And now and then rose up a tower foursquare
Lessening in stage on stage: with many a hue
The house walls glowed, of red and green and blue,

And some with gold were well adorned, and one
From roofs of gold flashed back the noontide sun.
Had we seen such a place not long ago
We should have made great haste to get thereto,
Deeming that it must be the heaven we sought.
But now while quietly we sat, and thought
Of many things, the gate wherein that road
Had end, was opened wide, and thereout flowed
A glittering throng of people, young and old,
And men and women, much adorned with gold;
Wherefore we rose to meet them, who stood still
When they beheld us winding down the hill,
And lined both sides of the grey road, but we
Now drawing nigh them, first of all could see
Old men in venerable raiment clad,
White bearded, who sweet flowering branches had
In their right hands, then young men armed right well
After their way, which now were long to tell,
Then damsels clad in radiant gold array,
Who with sweet-smelling blossoms strewed the way
Before our feet, then men with gleaming swords
And glittering robes, and crowned like mighty lords,
And last of all, within the very gate
The king himself, round whom our guides did wait,
Kneeling with humble faces downward bent.
What wonder if, as 'twixt these folk we went,
Hearkening their singing and sweet minstrelsy,
A little nigher seemed our heaven to be—
Alas, a fair folk, a sweet spot of earth,

A land where many a lovely thing has birth,
But where all fair things come at last to die.
Now when we three unto the king drew nigh
Before our fellows, he, adored of all,
Spared not before us on his knees to fall,
And as we deemed who knew his speech but ill,
Began to pray us to bide with him still,
Speaking withal of some old prophecy
Which seemed to say that there we should not die.
What could we do amidst these splendid lords?
No time it was to doubt or make long words,
Nor with a short but happy life at hand
Durst we to ask about the perfect land,
Though well we felt the life whereof he spoke,
Could never be among those mortal folk.
Therefore we way-worn, disappointed men,
So richly dowered with three-score years and ten,
Vouchsafed to grant the king his whole request,
Thinking within that town awhile to rest,
And gather news about the hope that fled
Still on before us, risen from the dead,
From out its tomb of toil and misery,
That held it while we saw but sea and sky,
Or untilled lands and people void of bliss,
And our own faces heavy with distress.

But entering now that town, what huge delight
We had therein, how lovely to our sight
Was the well-ordered life of people there,

Who on that night within a palace fair
Made us a feast with great solemnity,
Till we forgot that we came there to die
If we should leave our quest, for as great kings
They treated us, and whatsoever things
We asked for, or could think of, those were ours.
Houses we had, noble with walls and towers,
Lovely with gardens, cooled with running streams,
And rich with gold beyond a miser's dreams,
And men and women slaves, whose very lives
Were in our hands; and fair and princely wives
If so we would; and all things for delight,
Good to the taste or beautiful to sight
The land might yield. They taught us of their law,
The muster of their men-at-arms we saw,
As men who owned them; in their judgment-place
Our lightest word made glad the pleader's face,
And the judge trembled at our faintest frown.
Think then, if we, late driven up and down
Upon the uncertain sea, or struggling sore
With barbarous men upon an untilled shore,
Or at the best, midst people ignorant
Of arts and letters, fighting against want
Of very food—think if we now were glad
From day to day, and as folk crazed and mad
Deemed our old selves, the wanderers on the sea.
And if at whiles midst our felicity
We yet remembered us of that past day
When in the long swell off the land we lay,

Weeping for joy at our accomplished dream,
And each to each a very god did seem,
For fear was dead — if we remembered this,
Yet after all, was this our life of bliss,
A little thing that we had gained at last?
And must we sorrow for the idle past,
Or think it ill that thither we were led?
Thus seemed our old desire quite quenched and dead.
You must remember though, that we were young,
Five years had passed since the grey fieldfare sung
To me a dreaming youth laid 'neath the thorn,
And though while we were wandering and forlorn
I seemed grown old and withered suddenly,
But twenty summers had I seen go by
When I left Viken on that desperate cruise.
But now again our wrinkles did we lose
With memory of our ills, and like a dream
Our fevered quest with its bad days did seem,
And many things grew fresh again, forgot
While in our hearts that wild desire was hot:
Yea, though at thought of Norway we might sigh,
Small was the pain which that sweet memory
Brought with its images seen fresh and clear,
And many an old familiar thing grown dear,
We loved but little while we lived with it.

So smoothly o'er our heads the days did flit,
Yet not eventless either, for we taught
Such lore as we from our own land had brought

Unto this folk, who when they wrote must draw
Such draughts as erst at Micklegarth I saw,
Writ for the evil Pharaoh-kings of old;
Their arms were edged with copper or with gold,
Whereof they had great plenty, or with flint;
No armour had they fit to bear the dint
Of tools like ours, and little could avail
Their archer craft; their boats knew nought of sail,
And many a feat of building could we show,
Which midst their splendour still they did not know.
And midst of all, war fell upon the land,
And in forefront of battle must we stand,
To do our best, though little mastery
We thought it then to make such foemen flee
As there we met; but when again we came
Into the town, with something like to shame
We took the worship of that simple folk
Rejoicing for their freedom from the yoke
That round about their necks had hung so long.
For thus that war began: some monarch strong
Conquered their land of old, and thereon laid
A dreadful tribute, which they still had paid
With tears and curses; for as each fifth year
Came round, this heavy shame they needs must bear:
Ten youths, ten maidens must they choose by lot
Among the fairest that they then had got,
Who a long journey o'er the hills must go
Unto the tyrant, nor with signs of woe
Enter his city, but in bright array,

And harbingered by songs and carols gay,
Betake them to the temple of his god;
But when the streets their weary feet had trod
Their wails must crown the long festivity,
For on the golden altar must they die.

Such was the sentence till the year we came,
And counselled them to put away this shame
If they must die therefore, so on that year
Barren of blood the devil's altars were,
Wherefore a herald clad in strange attire
The tyrant sent them, and but blood and fire
His best words were; him they sent back again
Defied by us, who made his threats but vain,
When face to face with those ill folk we stood
Ready to seal our counsel with our blood.

Past all belief they loved us for all this,
And if it would have added to our bliss
That they should die, this surely they had done;
So smoothly slipped the years past one by one,
And we had lived and died as happy there
As any men the labouring earth may bear,
But for the poison of that wickedness
That led us on God's edicts to redress.
At first indeed death seemed so far away,
So sweet in our new home was every day,
That we forgot death like the most of men
Who cannot count the threescore years and ten;
Yet we grew fearful as the time drew on,
And needs must think of all we might have won,

Yea, by so much the happier that we were
By just so much increased on us our fear,
And those old times of our past misery
Seemed not so evil as the days went by
Faster and faster with the year's increase,
For loss of youth to us was loss of peace.

Two gates unto the road of life there are,
And to the happy youth both seem afar,
Both seem afar, so far the past one seems,
The gate of birth, made dim with many dreams,
Bright with remembered hopes, beset with flowers;
So far it seems he cannot count the hours
That to this midway path have led him on
Where every joy of life now seemeth won —
So far, he thinks not of the other gate,
Within whose shade the ghosts of dead hopes wait
To call upon him as he draws anear,
Despoiled, alone, and dull with many a fear,
"Where is thy work? how little thou hast done,
Where are thy friends, why art thou so alone?"
How shall he weigh his life? slow goes the time
The while the fresh dew-sprinkled hill we climb,
Thinking of what shall be the other side,
Slow pass perchance the minutes we abide
On the gained summit, blinking at the sun;
But when the downward journey is begun
No more our feet may loiter, past our ears
Shrieks the harsh wind scarce noted midst our fears,

And battling with the hostile things we meet
Till, ere we know it, our weak shrinking feet
Have brought us to the end and all is done.

. . .

And so with us it was, when youth twice won
Now for the second time had passed away,
And we unwitting were grown old and grey,
And one by one, the death of some dear friend,
Some cherished hope, brought to a troublous end
Our joyous life; as in a dawn of June
The lover, dreaming of the brown bird's tune
And longing lips unto his own brought near,
Wakes up the crashing thunder-peal to hear.
So, sirs, when this world's pleasures came to nought
Not upon God we set our wayward thought,
But on the folly our own hearts had made;
Once more the stories of the past we weighed
With what we hitherto had found, once more
We longed to be by some unknown far shore,
Once more our life seemed trivial, poor, and vain,
Till we our lost fool's paradise might gain,
And we were like the felon doomed to die,
Who when unto the sword he draws anigh
Struggles and cries, though erewhile in his cell
He heard the priest of heaven and pardon tell,
Weeping and half-contented to be slain.

Was I the first who thought of this again?
Perchance I was, but howsoe'er that be

Long time I thought of these things certainly
Ere I durst stir my fellows to the quest,
Though secretly myself, with little rest
For tidings of our lovely land I sought.
Should prisoners from another folk be brought
Unto our town, I questioned them of this;
I asked the wandering merchants of a bliss
They dreamed not of, in chaffering for their goods;
The hunter in the far-off lonely woods,
The fisher in the rivers nigh the sea,
Must tell their wild strange stories unto me.
Within the temples books of records lay
Such as I told of, thereon day by day
I pored, and got long stories from the priests
Of many-handed gods with heads of beasts,
And such like dreariness; and still, midst all
Sometimes a glimmering light would seem to fall
Upon my ignorance, and less content
As time went on I grew, and ever went
About my daily life distractedly,
Until at last I felt that I must die
Or to my fellows tell what in me was.
So on a day I came to Nicholas
And trembling 'gan to tell of this and that,
And as I spoke with downcast eyes I sat
Fearing to see some scorn within his eyes,
Or horror at unhappy memories;
But now, when mine eyes could no longer keep
The tears from falling, he too, nigh to weep,

Spoke out, "O Rolf, why hast thou come to me,
Who thinking I was happy, now must see
That only with the ending of our breath,
Or by that fair escape from fear and death
Can we forget the hope that erewhile led
Our little band to woe and drearihead?
But now are we grown old, Rolf, and to-day
Life is a little thing to cast away,
Nor can we suffer many years of it
If all goes wrong, so no more will I sit,
Praying for all the things that cannot be:
Tell thou our fellows what thou tellest me,
Nor fear that I will leave you in your need."

Well, sirs, with all the rest I had such speed
That men enough of us resolved to go
The very bitterness of death to know
Or else to conquer him; some idle tale
With our kind hosts would plenteously avail,
For of our quest we durst not tell them aught,
Since something more than doubt was in our thought,
Though unconfessed, that we should fail at last,
Nor had we quite forgot our perils past.

Alas! can weak men hide such thoughts as these?
I think the summer wind that bows the trees
Through which the dreamer wandereth muttering
Will bear abroad some knowledge of the thing
That so consumes him; howsoe'er that be,
We, born to drink the dregs of misery,

Found in the end that some one knew our aim.
For while we weighed the chances of the game
That we must play, nor yet knew what to shun,
Or what to do, there came a certain one,
A young man strange within the place, to me,
Who, swearing me at first to secrecy,
Began to tell me of the hoped-for land.
The trap I saw not, with a shaking hand
And beating heart, unto the notes of years
I turned, long parchments blotted with my tears,
And tremulously read them out aloud;
But still, because the hurrying thoughts would crowd
My whirling brain, scarce heard the words I read.
Yet in the end it seemed that what he said
Tallied with that, heaped up so painfully.
Now listen! this being done, he said to me,
"O godlike Eastern man, believest thou
That I who look so young and ruddy now
Am very old? because in sooth I come
To seek thee and to lead thee to our home
With all thy fellows. But if thou dost not,
Come now with me, for nigh unto this spot
My brother, left behind, an ancient man
Now dwelleth, but as grey-haired, weak and wan
As I am fresh; of me he doth not know,
So surely shall our speech together show,
The truth of this my message." "Yea," said I,
"I doubt thee not, yet would I certainly
Hear the old man talk if he liveth yet,

That I a clearer tale of this may set
Before my fellows; come then, lead me there."
Thus easily I fell into the snare;
For as along the well-known streets we went,
An old hoar man there met us, weak and bent,
Who staying us, the while with age he shook,
My lusty fellow by the shoulder took,
And said, "Oh, stranger canst thou be the son,
Or but the younger double of such an one,
Who dwelt once in the weaver's street hereby?"
But the young man looked on him lovingly,
And said, "O certes, thou art now grown old
That thou thy younger brother canst behold
And call him stranger." "Yea, yea, old enow,"
The other said, "what fables talkest thou?
My brother has but three years less than I,
Nor dealeth time with men so marvellously
That he should seem like twenty, I fourscore:
Thou art my nephew, let the jest pass o'er."
"Nay," said he, "but it is not good to talk
Here in the crowded street, so let us walk
Unto thine habitation; dost thou mind,
When we were boys, how once we chanced to find
That crock of copper money hid away
Up in the loft, and how on that same day
We bought this toy and that, thou a short sword
And I a brazen boat."
But at that word
The old man wildly on him 'gan to stare

And said no more, the while we three did fare
Unto his house, but there we being alone,
Many undoubted signs the younger one
Gave to his brother, saying withal, that he
Had gained the land of all felicity,
Where, after trials then too long to tell,
The slough of grisly eld from off him fell,
And left him strong, and fair, and young again;
Neither from that time had he suffered pain
Greater or less, or feared at all to die:
And though, he said, he knew not certainly
If he should live for ever, this he knew
His days should not be full of pain and few
As most men's lives were. Now when asked why he
Had left his home, a deadly land to see,
He said that people's chiefs had sent him there
Moved by report that tall men, white and fair,
Like to the Gods, had come across the sea
Of whom old seers had told that they should be
Lords of that land, therefore his charge was this,
To lead us forth to that abode of bliss,
But secretly, since for the other folk
They were as beasts to toil beneath the yoke,
"But," said he, "brother, thou shalt go with me,
If now at last no doubt be left in thee
Of who I am."

At that, to end it all
The weak old man upon his neck did fall,
Rejoicing for his lot with many tears:

But I, rejoicing too, yet felt vague fears
Within my heart, for now almost too nigh
We seemed to that long sought felicity.
What should I do though? What could it avail
Unto these men, to make a feigned tale?
Besides in all no faltering could I find,
Nor did they go beyond, or fall behind,
What in such cases such-like men would do,
Therefore I needs must think their story true.
So now unto my fellows did I go
And all things in due order straight did show,
And had the man who told the tale at hand;
Of whom some made great question of the land,
And where it was, and how he found it first;
And still he answered boldly to the worst
Of all their questions: then from out the place
He went, and we were left there face to face.
And joy it was to see the dark cheeks, tanned
By many a summer of that fervent land,
Flush up with joy, and see the grey eyes gleam
Through the dull film of years, as that sweet dream
Flickered before them, now grown real and true.
But when the certainty of all we knew,
Dreaming for sure our quest would not be vain,
We got us ready for the sea again.
But to the city's folk we told no more
Than that we needs must make for some far shore,
Whence we would come again to them, and bring
For them and us, full many a wished-for thing

To make them glad.
Then answered they indeed
That our departing made their hearts to bleed,
But with no long words prayed us still to stay,
And I remembered me of that past day,
And somewhat grieved I felt, that so it was:
Not thinking how the deeds of men must pass,
And their remembrance as their bodies die,
Or, if their memories fade not utterly,
Like curious pictures shall they be at best,
For men to gaze at while they sit at rest,
Talking of alien things and feasting well.

Ah me! I loiter, being right loth to tell
The things that happened to us in the end.
Down to the noble river did we wend
Where lay the ships we taught these folk to make,
And there the fairest of them did we take
And so began our voyage; thirty-three
Were left of us, who erst had crossed the sea,
Five of the forest people, and beside
None but the fair young man, our new-found guide,
And his old brother; setting sail with these
We left astern our gilded palaces
And all the good things God had given us there
With small regret, however good they were.
Well, in twelve days our vessel reached the sea,
When turning round we ran on northerly
In sight of land at whiles; what need to say

How the time past from hopeful day to day?
Suffice it that the wind was fair and good,
And we most joyful, as still north we stood;
Until when we a month at sea had been,
And for six days no land at all had seen,
We sighted it once more, whereon our guide
Shouted, "O fellows, lay all fear aside,
This is the land whereof I spake to you."
But when the happy tidings all men knew,
Trembling and pale we watched the land grow great,
And when above the waves the noontide heat
Had raised a vapour 'twixt us and the land
That afternoon, we saw a high ness stand
Out in the sea, and nigher when we came,
And all the sky with sunset was a-flame,
'Neath the dark hill we saw a city lie,
Washed by the waves, girt round with ramparts high.
A little nigher yet, and then our guide
Bade us to anchor, lowering from our side
The sailless keel wherein he erst had come,
Through many risks, to bring us to his home.
But when our eager hands this thing had done,
He and his brother gat therein alone.
But first he said, "Abide here till the morn,
And when ye hear the sound of harp and horn,
And varied music, run out every oar,
Up anchor, and make boldly for the shore.
O happy men! well-nigh do I regret
That I am not as you, to whom as yet

That moment past all moments is unknown,
When first unending life to you is shown.
But now I go, that all in readiness
May be, your souls with this delight to bless."
He waved farewell to us and went, but we,
As the night grew, beheld across the sea
Lights moving on the quays, and now and then
We heard the chanting of the outland men.
How can I tell of that strange troublous night,
Troublous and strange, though 'neath the moonshine white,
Peace seemed upon the sea, the glimmering town,
The shadows of the tree-besprinkled down,
The moveless dewy folds of our loose sail?
But how could these for peace to us avail?
Weary with longing, blind with great amaze,
We struggled now with past and future days;
And not in vain our former joy we thought,
Since thirty years our wandering feet had brought
To this at last—and yet, what will you have?
Can man be made content? We wished to save
The bygone years; our hope, our painted toy,
We feared to miss, drowned in that sea of joy.
Old faces still reproached us: "We are gone,
And ye are entering into bliss alone;
And can ye now forget? Year passes year,
And still ye live on joyous, free from fear;
But where are we? where is the memory
Of us, to whom ye once were drawn so nigh?

Forgetting and alone ye enter in;
Remembering all, alone we wail our sin,
And cannot touch you."—Ah, the blessed pain!
When heaven just gained was scarcely all a gain.
How could we weigh that boundless treasure then,
Or count the sorrows of the sons of men?
—Ah, woe is me to think upon that night!

Day came, and with the dawning of the light
We were astir, and from our deck espied
The people clustering by the water-side,
As if to meet us; then across the sea
We heard great horns strike up triumphantly,
And then scarce knowing what we did, we weighed
And running out the oars for shore we made,
With banners fluttering out from yard and mast.
We reached the well-built marble quays at last,
Crowded with folk, and in the front of these
There stood our guide, decked out with braveries,
Holding his feeble brother by the hand,
Then speechless, trembling, did we now take land,
Leaving all woes behind, but when our feet
The happy soil of that blest land did meet,
Fast fell our tears, as on a July day
The thunder-shower falls pattering on the way,
And certes some one we desired to bless,
But scarce knew whom midst all our thankfulness.
Now the crowd opened, and an ordered band
Of youths and damsels, flowering boughs in hand.

Came forth to meet us, just as long ago,
When first we won some rest from pain and woe,
Except that now eld chained not anyone,
No man was wrinkled but ourselves alone,
But smooth and beautiful, bright-eyed and glad,
Were all we saw, in fair thin raiment clad
Fit for the sunny place.

But now our friend,
Our guide, who brought us to this glorious end,
Led us amidst that band, who 'gan to sing
Some hymn of welcome, midst whose carolling
Faint-hearted men we must have been indeed
To doubt that all was won; nor did we heed
That, when we well were gotten from the quay,
Armed men went past us, by the very way
That we had come, nor thought of their intent,
For armour unto us was ornament,
And had been now, for many peaceful years,
Since bow and axe had dried the people's tears.

Let all that pass—with song and minstrelsy
Through many streets they led us, fair to see,
For nowhere did we meet maimed, poor, or old,
But all were young and clad in silk and gold.
Like a king's court the common ways did seem
On that fair morn of our accomplished dream.

Far did we go, through market-place and square,
Past fane and palace, till a temple fair
We came to, set aback midst towering trees,
But raised above the tallest of all these.

So there we entered through a brazen gate,
And all the thronging folk without did wait,
Except the golden-clad melodious band.
But when within the precinct we did stand,
Another rampart girdled round the fane,
And that being past another one again,
And small space was betwixt them, all these three
Of white stones laid in wondrous masonry
Were builded, but the fourth we now passed through
Was half of white and half of ruddy hue;
Nor did we reach the temple through this one,
For now a fifth wall came, of dark red stone
With golden coping and wide doors of gold;
And this being past, our eyes could then behold
The marvellous temple, foursquare, rising high
In stage on stage up toward the summer sky,
Like the unfinished tower that Nimrod built
Before the concord of the world was spilt.

So now we came into the lowest hall,
A mighty way across from wall to wall,
Where carven pillars held a gold roof up,
And silver walls fine as an Indian cup,
With figures monstrous as a dream were wrought,
And under foot the floor beyond all thought
Was wonderful, for like the tumbling sea
Beset with monsters did it seem to be;
But in the midst a pool of ruddy gold
Caught in its waves a glittering fountain cold,
And through the bright shower of its silver spray

Dimly we saw the high raised daïs, gay
With wondrous hangings, for high up and small
The windows were within the dreamlike hall;
Betwixt the pillars wandered damsels fair
Crooning low songs, or filling all the air
With incense wafted to strange images
That made us tremble, since we saw in these
The devils unto whom we now must cry
Ere we began our new felicity:
Nathless no altars did we see but one
Which dimly from before the daïs shone
Built of green stone, with horns of copper bright.
Now when we entered from the outer light
And all the scents of the fresh day were past,
With its sweet breezes, a dull shade seemed cast
Over our joy; what then? not if we would
Could we turn back—and surely all was good,
But now they brought us vestments rich and fair,
And bade us our own raiment put off there,
Which straight we did, and with a hollow sound
Like mournful bells our armour smote the ground,
And damsels took the weapons from our hands
That might have gleamed with death in other lands,
And won us praise; at last when all was done,
And brighter than the Kaiser each man shone,
Us unarmed helpless men the music led
Up to the daïs, and there our old guide said
"Rest, happy men, the time will not be long
Ere they will bring with incense, dance, and song

The sacred cup, your life and happiness,
And many a time this fair hour shall ye bless."

Alas, sirs! words are weak to tell of it,
I seemed to see a smile of mockery flit
Across his face as from our thrones he turned,
And in my heart a sudden fear there burned,
The last, I said, for ever and a day;
But even then with harsh and ominous bray
A trumpet through the monstrous pillars rung,
And to our feet with sudden fear we sprung—
Too late, too late! for through all doors did stream
Armed men, that filled the place with clash and gleam,
And when the dull sound of their moving feet
Was still, a fearful sight our eyes did meet,
A fearful sight to us—*old men and grey*
Betwixt the bands of soldiers took their way,
And at their head in wonderful attire,
Holding within his hand a pot of fire,
Moved the false brother of the traitrous guide,
Who with bowed head walked ever by his side;
But as anigh the elders 'gan to draw,
We, almost turned to stone by what we saw,
Heard the old man say to the younger one,
"Speak to them that thou knowest, O fair *Son!*"

Then the wretch said, "O ye, who sought to find
Unending life against the law of kind,
Within this land, fear ye not now too much,
For no man's hand your bodies here shall touch,

But rather with all reverence folk shall tend
Your daily lives, until at last they end
By slow decay: and ye shall pardon us
The trap whereby beings made so glorious
As ye are made, we drew unto this place.
Rest ye content then! for although your race
Comes from the gods, yet are ye conquered here,
As we would conquer them, if we knew where
They dwell from day to day, and with what arms
We, overcoming them, might win such charms
That we might make the world what ye desire.
"Rest then at ease, and if ye ere shall tire
Of this abode, remember at the worst
Life flitteth, whether it be blessed or cursed.
But will ye tire? ye are our gods on earth
Whiles that ye live, nor shall your lives lack mirth,
For song, fair women, and heart-cheering wine
The chain of solemn days shall here entwine
With odorous flowers; ah, surely ye are come,
When all is said, unto an envied home."

Like an old dream, dreamed in another dream,
I hear his voice now, see the hopeless gleam,
Through the dark place of that thick wood of spears.
That fountain's splash rings yet within mine ears
I thought the fountain of eternal youth—
Yet I can scarce remember in good truth
What then I felt: I should have felt as he,
Who, waking after some festivity

Sees a dim land; and things unspeakable,
And comes to know at last that it is hell—
I cannot tell you, nor can tell you why
Driven by what hope, I cried my battle cry
And rushed upon him; this I know indeed
My naked hands were good to me at need,
That sent the traitor to his due reward,
Ere I was dragged off by the hurrying guard,
Who spite of all used neither sword nor spear,
Nay as it seemed, touched us with awe and fear.
Though at the last grown all too weak to strive
They brought us to the daïs scarce alive,
And changed our tattered robes again, and there
Bound did we sit, each in his golden chair,
Beholding many mummeries that they wrought
About the altar; till at last they brought,
Crowned with fair flowers, and clad in robes of gold,
The folk that from the wood we won of old—
Why make long words? before our very eyes
Our friends they slew, a fitting sacrifice
To us their new gained gods, who sought to find
Within that land, a people just and kind
Who could not die, or take away the breath
From living men.
What thing but that same death
Had we left now to hope for? death must come
And find us somewhere an enduring home.
Will grief kill men, as some folk think it will?
Then are we of all men most hard to kill.

The time went past, the dreary days went by
In dull unvarying round of misery,
Nor can I tell if it went fast or slow,
What would it profit you the time to know
That we spent there; all I can say to you
Is, that no hope our prison wall shone through,
That ever we were guarded carefully,
While day and dark and dark and day went by
Like such a dream, as in the early night
The sleeper wakes from in such sore afright,
Such panting horror, that to sleep again
He will not turn, to meet such shameful pain.

Lo such were we, but as we hoped before
Where no hope was, so now, when all seemed o'er
But sorrow for our lives so cast away,
Again the bright sun brought about the day.
At last the temple's dull monotony
Was broke by noise of armed men hurrying by
Within the precinct, and we seemed to hear
Shouts from without of anger and of fear,
And noises as of battle; and red blaze
The night sky showed; this lasted through two days.
But on the third our guards were whispering
Pale faced, as though they feared some coming thing,
And when the din increased about noontide,
No longer there with us would they abide,
But left us free; judge then if our hearts beat,
When any pain or death itself was sweet

To hideous life within that wicked place,
Where every day brought on its own disgrace.
Few words betwixt us passed, we knew indeed
Where our old armour once so good at need
Hung up as relics nigh the altar-stead,
Thither we hurried, and from heel to head
Soon were we armed, and our old spears and swords
Clashing 'gainst steel and stone, spoke hopeful words
Tó us, the children of a warrior race.
But round unto the hubbub did we face
And through the precinct strove to make our way
Set close together; in besmirched array
Some met us, and some wounded very sore,
And some who wounded men to harbour bore;
But these too busy with their pain or woe
To note us much, unchallenged let us go:
Then here and there we passed some shrinking maid
In a dark corner trembling and afraid,
But eager for the news about the fight.
Through trodden gardens then we came in sight
Of the third rampart that begirt the fane,
Which now the foemen seemed at point to gain,
For o'er the wall the ladders 'gan to show,
And huge confusion was there down below
'Twixt wall and wall; but as the gate we passed
A man from out the crowd came hurrying fast,
But, drawing nigh us, stopped short suddenly,
And cried, "O, masters, help us or we die!
This impious people 'gainst their ancient lords

Have turned, and in their madness drawn their swords.
Yea, and they now prevail, and fearing not
The dreadful gods still grows their wrath more hot.
Wherefore to bring you here was my intent,
But the kind gods themselves your hands have sent
To save us all, and this fair holy house
With your strange arms, and hearts most valorous."
No word we said, for even as he spoke
A frightful clamour from the wall outbroke,
As the thin line of soldiers thereupon
Crushed back, and broken, left the rampart won,
And leapt and tumbled therefrom as they could,
While in their place the conquering foemen stood:
Then the weak, wavering, huddled crowd below
Their weight upon the inner wall 'gan throw,
And at the narrow gates by hundreds died;
For not long did the enemy abide
On the gained rampart, but by every way
Got to the ground and 'gan all round to slay,
Till great and grim the slaughter grew to be.
But we well pleased our tyrants' end to see
Still firm against the inner wall did stand,
While round us surged the press on either hand.
Nor did we fear, for what was left of life
For us to fear for? so at last the strife
Drawn inward, in that place did much abate,
And we began to move unto the gate
Betwixt the dead and living, and these last
Ever with fearful glances by us passed

Nor hindered aught; but mindful of the lore
Our fathers gained on many a bloody shore,
We, when unto the street we made our way,
Moved as in fight nor broke our close array,
Though no man harmed us of the troubled crowd
That thronged the streets with shouts and curses loud,
But rather when our clashing arms they heard
Their hubbub lulled, and they as men afeard
Drew back before us.

Well, as nigh we drew
Unto the sea, the men showed sparse and few,
Though frightened women standing in the street
Before their doors we did not fail to meet,
And passed by folk who at their doors laid down
Men wounded in the fight; so through the town
We reached the unguarded water-gate at last,
And there, nigh weeping, saw the green waves cast
Against the quays, whereby five tall ships lay:
For in that devil's house, right many a day
Had passed with all its dull obscenity
We counted not, and while we longed to die,
And by all men were now forgotten quite
Except those priests, the people as they might
Made ships like ours; in whose new handiwork
Few mariners and fearful now did lurk,
And these soon fled before us, therefore we
Stayed not to think, but running hastily
Down the lone quay, seized on the nighest ship,
Nor yet till we had let the hawser slip

Dared we be glad, and then indeed once more,
Though we no longer hoped for our fair shore,
Our past disgrace, worse than the very hell, [well,
Though hope was dead, made things seem more than
For if we died that night, yet were we free.

Ah! with what joy we sniffed the fresh salt sea
After the musky odours of that place;
With what delight each felt upon his face
The careless wind, our master and our slave,
As through the green seas fast from shore we drave,
Scarce witting where we went.

But now when we
Beheld that city, far across the sea,
A thing gone past, nor any more could hear
The mingled shouts of victory and of fear,
From out the midst thereof shot up a fire
In a long, wavering, murky, smoke-capped spire
That still with every minute wider grew,
So that the ending of the place we knew
Where we had passed such days of misery,
And still more glad turned round unto the sea.

My tale grows near its ending, for we stood
Southward to our kind folk e'en as we could,
But made slow way, for ever heavily
Our ship sailed, and she often needs must lie
At anchor in some bay, the while with fear
Ourselves, we followed up the fearful deer,
Or filled our water-vessels, for indeed,

Of meat and drink were we in bitter need,
As well might be, for scarcely could we choose
What ships from off that harbour to cast loose.
Midst this there died the captain, Nicholas,
Whom, though he brought us even to this pass,
I loved the most of all men; even now
When that seems long past, I can scarce tell how
I bear to live, since he could live no more.
Certes he took our failure very sore,
And often do I think he fain had died,
But yet for very love must needs abide
A little while, and yet awhile again,
As though to share the utmost of our pain,
And miss the ray of comfort and sweet rest
Wherewith ye end our long disastrous quest—
—A drearier place than ever heretofore
The world seemed, as from that far nameless shore
We turned and left him 'neath the trees to bide;
For midst our rest worn out at last he died.
And such seemed like to hap to us as well,
If any harder thing to us befell
Than was our common life; and still we talked
How our old friends would meet men foiled, and balked
Of all the things that were to make them glad;
Ah, sirs! no sight of them henceforth we had;
A wind arose, which blowing furiously
Drove us out helpless to the open sea;
Eight days it blew, and when it fell, we lay
Leaky, dismasted, a most helpless prey

To winds and waves, and with but little food;
Then with hard toil a feeble sail and rude
We rigged up somehow, and nigh hopelessly,
Expecting death, we staggered o'er the sea
For ten days more, but when all food and drink
Were gone for three days, and we needs must think
That in mid ocean we were doomed to die,
One morn again did land before us lie:
And we rejoiced, as much at least as he,
Who tossing on his bed deliriously,
Tortured with pain, hears the physician say
That he shall have one quiet painless day
Before he dies—What more? we soon did stand
In this your peaceful and delicious land
Amongst the simple kindly country folk,
But when I heard the language that they spoke,
From out my heart a joyous cry there burst,
So sore for friendly words was I athirst,
And I must fall a-weeping, to have come
To such a place that seemed a blissful home,
After the tossing from rough sea to sea;
So weak at last, so beaten down were we.

What shall I say in these kind people's praise
Who treated us like brothers for ten days,
Till with their tending we grew strong again,
And then withal in country cart and wain
Brought us unto this city where we are;
May God be good to them for all their care.

And now, sirs, all our wanderings have ye heard,

And all our story to the utmost word;
And here hath ending all our foolish quest,
Not at the worst if hardly at the best,
Since ye are good—Sirs, we are old and grey
Before our time; in what coin shall we pay
For this your goodness; take it not amiss
That we, poor souls, must pay you back for this
As good men pay back God Who, raised above
The heavens and earth, yet needeth earthly love.

THE ELDER OF THE CITY.

Oh, friends, content you! this is much indeed,
And we are paid, thus garnering for our need
Your blessings only, bringing in their train
God's blessings as the south wind brings the rain.
And for the rest, no little thing shall be
(Since ye through all yet keep your memory)
The gentle music of the bygone years,
Long past to us with all their hopes and fears.
Think, if the gods, who mayhap love us well,
Sent to our gates some ancient chronicle
Of that sweet unforgotten land long left,
Of all the lands wherefrom we now are reft—
—Think, with what joyous hearts, what reverence,
What songs, what sweet flowers we should bring it thence,
What images would guard it, what a shrine
Above its well-loved black and white should shine!
How should it pay our labour day by day

To look upon the fair place where it lay;
With what rejoicings even should we take
Each well-writ copy that the scribes might make,
And bear them forth to hear the people's shout,
E'en as good rulers' children are borne out
To take the people's blessing on their birth,
When all the city falls to joy and mirth.

Such, sirs, are ye, our living chronicle,
And scarce can we be grieved at what befell
Your lives in that too hopeless quest of yours,
Since it shall bring us wealth of happy hours
Whiles that we live, and to our sons, delight,
And their sons' sons.

But now, sirs, let us go,
That we your new abodes with us may show,
And tell you what your life henceforth may be,
But poor, alas, to that ye hoped to see.

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THINK, listener, that I had the luck to stand,
Awhile ago within a flowery land,
Fair beyond words; that thence I brought away
Some blossoms that before my footsteps lay,
Not plucked by me, not over-fresh or bright;
Yet, since they minded me of that delight,
Within the pages of this book I laid
Their tender petals, there in peace to fade.
Dry are they now, and void of all their scent
And lovely colour, yet what once was meant
By these dull stains, some men may yet descry
As dead upon the quivering leaves they lie.
Behold them here, and mock me if you will,
But yet believe no scorn of men can kill
My love of that fair land wherefrom they came,
Where midst the grass their petals once did flame.

Moreover, since that land as ye should know,
Bears not alone the gems for summer's show,
Or gold and pearls for fresh green-coated spring,
Or rich adornment for the flickering wing
Of fleeting autumn, but hath little fear
For the white conqueror of the fruitful year,
So in these pages month by month I show
Some portion of the flowers that erst did blow
In lovely meadows of the varying land,
Wherein erewhile I had the luck to stand.

MARCH.

SLAYER of the winter, art thou here again?
O welcome, thou that bring'st the summer nigh!
The bitter wind makes not thy victory vain,
Nor will we mock thee for thy faint blue sky.
Welcome, O March! whose kindly days and dry
Make April ready for the throstle's song,
Thou first redresser of the winter's wrong!

Yea, welcome March! and though I die ere June,
Yet for the hope of life I give thee praise,
Striving to swell the burden of the tune
That even now I hear thy brown birds raise,
Unmindful of the past or coming days;
Who sing: 'O joy! a new year is begun:
What happiness to look upon the sun!'

Ah, what begetteth all this storm of bliss
But Death himself, who crying solemnly,
E'en from the heart of sweet Forgetfulness,
Bids us 'Rejoice, lest pleasureless ye die.
Within a little time must ye go by.
Stretch forth your open hands, and while ye live
Take all the gifts that Death and Life may give.'

BEHOLD once more within a quiet land
The remnant of that once aspiring band,
With all hopes fallen away, but such as light
The sons of men to that unfailing night,
That death they needs must look on face to face.
Time passed, and ever fell the days apace
From off the new-strung chaplet of their life;
Yet though the time with no bright deeds was rife,
Though no fulfilled desire now made them glad,
They were not quite unhappy, rest they had,
And with their hope their fear had passed away;
New things and strange they saw from day to day;
Honoured they were, and had no lack of things
For which men crouch before the feet of kings,
And, stripped of honour, yet may fail to have.
Therefore their latter journey to the grave
Was like those days of later autumn-tide,
When he who in some town may chance to bide
Opens the window for the balmy air,
And seeing the golden hazy sky so fair,
And from some city garden hearing still
The wheeling rooks the air with music fill,
Sweet hopeful music, thinketh, Is this spring,
Surely the year can scarce be perishing?
But then he leaves the clamour of the town,
And sees the withered scanty leaves fall down,

The half-ploughed field, the flowerless garden-plot,
The dark full stream by summer long forgot,
The tangled hedges where, relaxed and dead,
The twining plants their withered berries shed,
And feels therewith the treachery of the sun,
And knows the pleasant time is well-nigh done.
In such St. Luke's short summer lived these men,
Nearing the goal of threescore years and ten;
The elders of the town their comrades were,
And they to them were waxen now as dear
As ancient men to ancient men can be;
Grave matters of belief and polity
They spoke of oft, but not alone of these;
For in their times of idleness and ease
They told of poets' vain imaginings,
And memories vague of half-forgotten things,
Not true or false, but sweet to think upon.

For nigh the time when first that land they won,
When new-born March made fresh the hopeful air,
The wanderers sat within a chamber fair,
Guests of that city's rulers, when the day
Far from the sunny noon had fallen away;
The sky grew dark, and on the window-pane
They heard the beating of the sudden rain.
Then, all being satisfied with plenteous feast,
There spoke an ancient man, the land's chief priest,
Who said, "Dear guests, the year begins to-day,
And fain are we, before it pass away,

To hear some tales of that now altered world,
Wherefrom our fathers in old time were hurled
By the hard hands of fate and destiny.
Nor would ye hear perchance unwillingly
How we have dealt with stories of the land
Wherein the tombs of our forefathers stand:
Wherefore henceforth two solemn feasts shall be
In every month, at which some history
Shall crown our joyance; and this day, indeed,
I have a story ready for our need,
If ye will hear it, though perchance it is
That many things therein are writ amiss,
This part forgotten, that part grown too great,
For these things, too, are in the hands of fate."

They cried aloud for joy to hear him speak,
And as again the sinking sun did break
Through the dark clouds and blazed adown the hall,
His clear thin voice upon their ears did fall,
Telling a tale of times long passed away,
When men might cross a kingdom in a day,
And kings remembered they should one day die,
And all folk dwelt in great simplicity.

ATALANTA'S RACE.

ARGUMENT.

ATALANTA, daughter of King Schœneus, not willing to lose her virgin's estate, made it a law to all suitors that they should run a race with her in the public place, and if they failed to overcome her should die unrevenged; and thus many brave men perished. At last came Milanion, the son of Amphidamas, who, outrunning her with the help of Venus, gained the virgin and wedded her.

THROUGH thick Arcadian woods a hunter wẽnt,
Following the beasts up, on a fresh spring day;
But since his horn-tipped bow but seldom bent,
Now at the noontide nought had happed to slay,
Within a vale he called his hounds away,
Hearkening the echoes of his lone voice cling
About the cliffs and through the beech-trees ring.

But when they ended, still awhile he stood,
And but the sweet familiar thrush could hear,
And all the day-long noises of the wood,
And o'er the dry leaves of the vanished year
His hounds' feet pattering as they drew anear,
And heavy breathing from their heads low hung,
To see the mighty cornel bow unstrung.

Then smiling did he turn to leave the place,
But with his first step some new fleeting thought
A shadow cast across his sun-burnt face;
I think the golden net that April brought
From some warm world his wavering soul had caught;
For, sunk in vague sweet longing, did he go
Betwixt the trees with doubtful steps and slow.

Yet howsoever slow he went, at last
The trees grew sparser, and the wood was done;
Whereon one farewell, backward look he cast,
Then, turning round to see what place was won,
With shaded eyes looked underneath the sun,
And o'er green meads and new-turned furrows brown
Beheld the gleaming of King Schœneus' town.

So thitherward he turned, and on each side
The folk were busy on the teeming land,
And man and maid from the brown furrows cried,
Or midst the newly-blossomed vines did stand,
And as the rustic weapon pressed the hand
Thought of the nodding of the well-filled ear,
Or how the knife the heavy bunch should shear.

Merry it was: about him sung the birds,
The spring flowers bloomed along the firm dry road,
The sleek-skinned mothers of the sharp-horned herds
Now for the barefoot milking-maidens lowed;
While from the freshness of his blue abode,

Glad his death-bearing arrows to forget,
The broad sun blazed, nor scattered plagues as yet.

Through such fair things unto the gates he came,
And found them open, as though peace were there;
Wherethrough, unquestioned of his race or name,
He entered, and along the streets 'gan fare,
Which at the first of folk were well-nigh bare;
But pressing on, and going more hastily,
Men hurrying too he 'gan at last to see.

Following the last of these, he still pressed on,
Until an open space he came unto,
Where wreaths of fame had oft been lost and won,
For feats of strength folk there were wont to do.
And now our hunter looked for something new,
Because the whole wide space was bare, and stilled
The high seats were, with eager people filled.

There with the others to a seat he gat,
Whence he beheld a broidered canopy,
Neath which in fair array King Schœneus sat
Upon his throne with councillors thereby;
And underneath this well-wrought seat and high,
He saw a golden image of the sun,
A silver image of the Fleet-foot One.

A brazen altar stood beneath their feet
Whereon a thin flame flickered in the wind;

Nigh this a herald clad in raiment meet
Made ready even now his horn to wind,
By whom a huge man held a sword, entwined
With yellow flowers; these stood a little space
From off the altar, nigh the starting place.

And there two runners did the sign abide
Foot set to foot,—a young man slim and fair,
Crisp-haired, well knit, with firm limbs often tried
In places where no man his strength may spare;
Dainty his thin coat was, and on his hair
A golden circlet of renown he wore,
And in his hand an olive garland bore.

But on this day with whom shall he contend?
A maid stood by him like Diana clad
When in the woods she lists her bow to bend,
Too fair for one to look on and be glad,
Who scarcely yet has thirty summers had,
If he must still behold her from afar;
Too fair to let the world live free from war.

She seemed all earthly matters to forget;
Of all tormenting lines her face was clear,
Her wide grey eyes upon the goal were set
Calm and unmoved as though no soul were near,
But her foe trembled as a man in fear,
Nor from her loveliness one moment turned
His anxious face with fierce desire that burned.

Now through the hush there broke the trumpet's clang
Just as the setting sun made eventide.
Then from light feet a spurt of dust there sprang,
And swiftly were they running side by side;
But silent did the thronging folk abide
Until the turning-post was reached at last,
And round about it still abreast they passed.

But when the people saw how close they ran,
When halfway to the starting-point they were,
A cry of joy broke forth, whereat the man
Headed the white-foot runner, and drew near
Unto the very end of all his fear;
And scarce his straining feet the ground could feel,
And bliss unhoped for o'er his heart 'gan steal.

But midst the loud victorious shouts he heard
Her footsteps drawing nearer, and the sound
Of fluttering raiment, and thereat afeard
His flushed and eager face he turned around,
And even then he felt her past him bound
Fleet as the wind, but scarcely saw her there
Till on the goal she laid her fingers fair.

There stood she breathing like a little child
Amid some warlike clamour laid asleep,
For no victorious joy her red lips smiled,
Her cheek its wonted freshness did but keep;
No glance lit up her clear grey eyes and deep,

Though some divine thought softened all her face
As once more rang the trumpet through the place.

But her late foe stopped short amidst his course,
One moment gazed upon her piteously,
Then with a groan his lingering feet did force
To leave the spot whence he her eyes could see;
And, changed like one who knows his time must be
But short and bitter, without any word
He knelt before the bearer of the sword;

Then high rose up the gleaming deadly blade,
Bared of its flowers, and through the crowded place
Was silence now, and midst of it the maid
Went by the poor wretch at a gentle pace,
And he to hers upturned his sad white face;
Nor did his eyes behold another sight
Ere on his soul there fell eternal night.

SO was the pageant ended, and all folk
Talking of this and that familiar thing
In little groups from that sad concourse broke,
For now the shrill bats were upon the wing,
And soon dark night would slay the evening,
And in dark gardens sang the nightingale
Her little-heeded, oft-repeated tale.

And with the last of all the hunter went,
Who, wondering at the strange sight he had seen,
Prayed an old man to tell him what it meant,
Both why the vanquished man so slain had been,
And if the maiden were an earthly queen,
Or rather what much more she seemed to be,
No sharer in the world's mortality.

"Stranger," said he, "I pray she soon may die
Whose lovely youth has slain so many an one!
King Schœneus' daughter is she verily,
Who when her eyes first looked upon the sun
Was fain to end her life but new begun,
For he had vowed to leave but men alone
Sprung from his loins when he from earth was gone.

"Therefore he bade one leave her in the wood,
And let wild things deal with her as they might,
But this being done, some cruel god thought good
To save her beauty in the world's despite:
Folk say that her, so delicate and white
As now she is, a rough root-grubbing bear
Amidst her shapeless cubs at first did rear.

"In course of time the woodfolk slew her nurse,
And to their rude abode the youngling brought,
And reared her up to be a kingdom's curse,
Who grown a woman, of no kingdom thought,
But armed and swift, 'mid beasts destruction wrought,

Nor spared two shaggy centaur kings to slay
To whom her body seemed an easy prey.

"So to this city, led by fate, she came
Whom known by signs, whereof I cannot tell,
King Schœneus for his child at last did claim,
Nor otherwhere since that day doth she dwell
Sending too many a noble soul to hell—
What! thine eyes glisten! what then, thinkest thou
Her shining head unto the yoke to bow?

"Listen, my son, and love some other maid
For she the saffron gown will never wear,
And on no flower-strewn couch shall she be laid,
Nor shall her voice make glad a lover's ear:
Yet if of Death thou hast not any fear,
Yea, rather, if thou lovest him utterly,
Thou still may'st woo her ere thou comest to die,

"Like him that on this day thou sawest lie dead;
For, fearing as I deem the sea-born one,
The maid has vowed e'en such a man to wed
As in the course her swift feet can outrun,
But whoso fails herein, his days are done:
He came the nighest that was slain to-day,
Although with him I deem she did but play.

"Behold, such mercy Atalanta gives
To those that long to win her loveliness;

Be wise! be sure that many a maid there lives
Gentler than she, of beauty little less,
Whose swimming eyes thy loving words shall bless,
When in some garden, knee set close to knee,
Thou sing'st the song that love may teach to thee."

So to the hunter spake that ancient man,
And left him for his own home presently:
But he turned round, and through the moonlight wan
Reached the thick wood, and there 'twixt tree and tree
Distraught he passed the long night feverishly,
'Twixt sleep and waking, and at dawn arose
To wage hot war against his speechless foes.

There to the hart's flank seemed his shaft to grow,
As panting down the broad green glades he flew,
There by his horn the Dryads well might know
His thrust against the bear's heart had been true,
And there Adonis' bane his javelin slew,
But still in vain through rough and smooth he went,
For none the more his restlessness was spent.

So wandering, he to Argive cities came,
And in the lists with valiant men he stood,
And by great deeds he won him praise and fame,
And heaps of wealth for little-valued blood;
But none of all these things, or life, seemed good
Unto his heart, where still unsatisfied
A ravenous longing warred with fear and pride,

Therefore it happed when but a month had gone
Since he had left King Schœneus' city old,
In hunting-gear again, again alone
The forest-bordered meads did he behold,
Where still mid thoughts of August's quivering gold
Folk hoed the wheat, and clipped the vine in trust
Of faint October's purple-foaming must.

And once again he passed the peaceful gate,
While to his beating heart his lips did lie,
That owning not victorious love and fate,
Said, half aloud, "And here too must I try,
To win of alien men the mastery,
And gather for my head fresh meed of fame
And cast new glory on my father's name."

In spite of that, how beat his heart, when first
Folk said to him, "And art thou come to see
That which still makes our city's name accurst
Among all mothers for its cruelty?
Then know indeed that fate is good to thee
Because to-morrow a new luckless one
Against the whitefoot maid is pledged to run."

So on the morrow with no curious eyes
As once he did, that piteous sight he saw,
Nor did that wonder in his heart arise
As toward the goal the conquering maid 'gan draw,
Nor did he gaze upon her eyes with awe,

Too full the pain of longing filled his heart
For fear or wonder there to have a part.

But O, how long the night was ere it went!
How long it was before the dawn begun
Showed to the wakening birds the sun's intent
That not in darkness should the world be done!
And then, and then, how long before the sun
Bade silently the toilers of the earth
Get forth to fruitless cares or empty mirth!

And long it seemed that in the market-place
He stood and saw the chaffering folk go by,
Ere from the ivory throne King Schœneus' face
Looked down upon the murmur royally,
But then came trembling that the time was nigh
When he midst pitying looks his love must claim,
And jeering voices must salute his name.

But as the throng he pierced to gain the throne,
His alien face distraught and anxious told
What hopeless errand he was bound upon,
And, each to each, folk whispered to behold
His godlike limbs; nay, and one woman old
As he went by must pluck him by the sleeve
And pray him yet that wretched love to leave.

For sidling up she said, "Canst thou live twice,
Fair son? canst thou have joyful youth again,

That thus thou goest to the sacrifice
Thyself the victim? nay then, all in vain
Thy mother bore her longing and her pain,
And one more maiden on the earth must dwell
Hopeless of joy, nor fearing death and hell.

"O, fool, thou knowest not the compact then
That with the threeformed goddess she has made
To keep her from the loving lips of men,
And in no saffron gown to be arrayed,
And therewithal with glory to be paid,
And love of her the moonlit river sees
White 'gainst the shadow of the formless trees.

"Come back, and I myself will pray for thee
Unto the sea-born framer of delights,
To give thee her who on the earth may be
The fairest stirrer up to death and fights,
To quench with hopeful days and joyous nights
The flame that doth thy youthful heart consume:
Come back, nor give thy beauty to the tomb."

How should he listen to her earnest speech?
Words, such as he not once or twice had said
Unto himself, whose meaning scarce could reach
The firm abode of that sad hardihead—
He turned about, and through the marketstead
Swiftly he passed, until before the throne
In the cleared space he stood at last alone.

Then said the King, "Stranger, what dost thou here?
Have any of my folk done ill to thee?
Or art thou of the forest men in fear?
Or art thou of the sad fraternity
Who still will strive my daughter's mates to be,
Staking their lives to win to earthly bliss
The lonely maid, the friend of Artemis?"

"O King," he said, "thou sayest the word indeed;
Nor will I quit the strife till I have won
My sweet delight, or death to end my need.
And know that I am called Milanion,
Of King Amphidamas the well-loved son:
So fear not that to thy old name, O King,
Much loss or shame my victory will bring."

"Nay, Prince," said Schœneus, "welcome to this land
Thou wert indeed, if thou wert here to try
Thy strength 'gainst some one mighty of his hand;
Nor would we grudge thee well-won mastery.
But now, why wilt thou come to me to die,
And at my door lay down thy luckless head,
Swelling the band of the unhappy dead,

"Whose curses even now my heart doth fear?
Lo, I am old, and know what life can be,
And what a bitter thing is death anear.
O Son! be wise, and hearken unto me,
And if no other can be dear to thee,

At least as now, yet is the world full wide,
And bliss in seeming hopeless hearts may hide:

"But if thou losest life, then all is lost."
"Nay, King," Milanion said, "thy words are vain.
Doubt not that I have counted well the cost.
But say, on what day wilt thou that I gain
Fulfilled delight, or death to end my pain?
Right glad were I if it could be to-day,
And all my doubts at rest for ever lay."

"Nay," said King Schœneus, "thus it shall not be,
But rather shalt thou let a month go by,
And weary with thy prayers for victory
What god thou know'st the kindest and most nigh.
So doing, still perchance thou shalt not die:
And with my goodwill wouldst thou have the maid,
For of the equal gods I grow afraid.

"And until then, O Prince, be thou my guest,
And all these troublous things awhile forget."
"Nay," said he, "couldst thou give my soul good rest,
And on mine head a sleepy garland set,
Then had I 'scaped the meshes of the net,
Nor shouldst thou hear from me another word;
But now, make sharp thy fearful heading sword.

"Yet will I do what son of man may do,
And promise all the gods may most desire,

That to myself I may at least be true;
And on that day my heart and limbs so tire,
With utmost strain and measureless desire,
That, at the worst, I may but fall asleep
When in the sunlight round that sword shall sweep."

He went with that, nor anywhere would bide,
But unto Argos restlessly did wend;
And there, as one who lays all hope aside,
Because the leech has said his life must end,
Silent farewell he bade to foe and friend,
And took his way unto the restless sea,
For there he deemed his rest and help might be.

UPON the shore of Argolis there stands
A temple to the goddess that he sought,
That, turned unto the lion-bearing lands,
Fenced from the east, of cold winds hath no thought,
Though to no homestead there the sheaves are brought,
No groaning press torments the close-clipped murk,
Lonely the fane stands, far from all men's work.

Pass through a close, set thick with myrtle trees,
Through the brass doors that guard the holy place,
And entering, hear the washing of the seas

That twice a-day rise high above the base,
And with the south-west urging them, embrace
The marble feet of her that standeth there
That shrink not, naked though they be and fair.

Small is the fane through which the seawind sings
About Queen Venus' well-wrought image white,
But hung around are many precious things,
The gifts of those who, longing for delight,
Have hung them there within the goddess' sight,
And in return have taken at her hands
The living treasures of the Grecian lands.

And thither now has come Milanion,
And showed unto the priests' wide open eyes
Gifts fairer than all those that there have shone,
Silk cloths, inwrought with Indian fantasies,
And bowls inscribed with sayings of the wise
Above the deeds of foolish living things,
And mirrors fit to be the gifts of kings.

And now before the Sea-born One he stands,
By the sweet veiling smoke made dim and soft,
And while the incense trickles from his hands,
And while the odorous smoke-wreaths hang aloft,
Thus doth he pray to her: "O Thou, who oft
Hast holpen man and maid in their distress,
Despise me not for this my wretchedness!

"O goddess, among us who dwell below,
Kings and great men, great for a little while,
Have pity on the lowly heads that bow,
Nor hate the hearts that love them without guile;
Wilt thou be worse than these, and is thy smile
A vain device of him who set thee here,
An empty dream of some artificer?

"O, great one, some men love, and are ashamed;
Some men are weary of the bonds of love;
Yea, and by some men lightly art thou blamed,
That from thy toils their lives they cannot move,
And 'mid the ranks of men their manhood prove.
Alas! O goddess, if thou slayest me
What new immortal can I serve but thee?

"Think then, will it bring honour to thy head
If folk say, 'Everything aside he cast
And to all fame and honour was he dead,
And to his one hope now is dead at last,
Since all unholpen he is gone and past:
Ah, the gods love not man, for certainly,
He to his helper did not cease to cry.'

"Nay, but thou wilt help; they who died before
Not single-hearted as I deem came here,
Therefore unthanked they laid their gifts before
Thy stainless feet, still shivering with their fear,
Lest in their eyes their true thought might appear,

Who sought to be the lords of that fair town,
Dreaded of men and winners of renown.

"O Queen, thou knowest I pray not for this:
O set us down together in some place
Where not a voice can break our heaven of bliss,
Where nought but rocks and I can see her face,
Softening beneath the marvel of thy grace,
Where not a foot our vanished steps can track—
The golden age, the golden age come back!

"O fairest, hear me now who do thy will,
Plead for thy rebel that she be not slain,
But live and love and be thy servant still;
Ah, give her joy and take away my pain,
And thus two long enduring servants gain.
An easy thing this is to do for me,
What need of my vain words to weary thee!

"But none the less, this place will I not leave
Until I needs must go my death to meet,
Or at thy hands some happy sign receive
That in great joy we twain may one day greet
Thy presence here and kiss thy silver feet,
Such as we deem thee, fair beyond all words,
Victorious o'er our servants and our lords."

Then from the altar back a space he drew,
But from the Queen turned not his face away,

But 'gainst a pillar leaned, until the blue
That arched the sky, at ending of the day,
Was turned to ruddy gold and changing grey,
And clear, but low, the nigh-ebbed windless sea
In the still evening murmured ceaselessly.

And there he stood when all the sun was down,
Nor had he moved, when the dim golden light,
Like the far lustre of a godlike town,
Had left the world to seeming hopeless night,
Nor would he move the more when wan moonlight
Streamed through the pillars for a little while,
And lighted up the white Queen's changeless smile.

Nought noted he the shallow flowing sea
As step by step it set the wrack a-swim,
The yellow torchlight nothing noted he
Wherein with fluttering gown and half-bared limb
The temple damsels sung their midnight hymn,
And nought the doubled stillness of the fane
When they were gone, and all was hushed again.

But when the waves had touched the marble base,
And steps the fish swim over twice a-day,
The dawn beheld him sunken in his place
Upon the floor; and sleeping there he lay,
Not heeding aught the little jets of spray
The roughened sea brought nigh, across him cast,
For as one dead all thought from him had passed.

Yet long before the sun had showed his head,
Long ere the varied hangings on the wall
Had gained once more their blue and green and red,
He rose as one some well-known sign doth call
When war upon the city's gates doth fall,
And scarce like one fresh risen out of sleep,
He 'gan again his broken watch to keep.

Then he turned round; not for the sea-gull's cry
That wheeled above the temple in his flight,
Not for the fresh south wind that lovingly
Breathed on the new-born day and dying night,
But some strange hope 'twixt fear and great delight
Drew round his face, now flushed, now pale and wan,
And still constrained his eyes the sea to scan.

Now a faint light lit up the southern sky,
Not sun or moon, for all the world was grey,
But this a bright cloud seemed, that drew anigh,
Lighting the dull waves that beneath it lay
As toward the temple still it took its way,
And still grew greater, till Milanion
Saw nought for dazzling light that round him shone.

But as he staggered with his arms outspread,
Delicious unnamed odours breathed around,
For languid happiness he bowed his head,
And with wet eyes sank down upon the ground,
Nor wished for aught, nor any dream he found

To give him reason for that happiness,
Or make him ask more knowledge of his bliss.

At last his eyes were cleared, and he could see
Through happy tears the goddess face to face
With that faint image of Divinity,
Whose well-wrought smile and dainty changeless grace
Until that morn so gladdened all the place;
Then he, unwitting cried aloud her name
And covered up his eyes for fear and shame.

But through the stillness he her voice could hear
Piercing his heart with joy scarce bearable,
That said, "Milanion, wherefore dost thou fear,
I am not hard to those who love me well;
List to what I a second time will tell,
And thou mayest hear perchance, and live to save
The cruel maiden from a loveless grave.

"See, by my feet three golden apples lie —
Such fruit among the heavy roses falls,
Such fruit my watchful damsels carefully
Store up within the best loved of my walls,
Ancient Damascus, where the lover calls
Above my unseen head, and faint and light
The rose-leaves flutter round me in the night.

"And note, that these are not alone most fair
With heavenly gold, but longing strange they bring

Unto the hearts of men, who will not care
Beholding these, for any once-loved thing
Till round the shining sides their fingers cling.
And thou shalt see thy well-girt swiftfoot maid
By sight of these amid her glory stayed.

"For bearing these within a scrip with thee,
When first she heads thee from the starting-place
Cast down the first one for her eyes to see,
And when she turns aside make on apace,
And if again she heads thee in the race
Spare not the other two to cast aside
If she not long enough behind will bide.

"Farewell, and when has come the happy time
That she Diana's raiment must unbind
And all the world seems blessed with Saturn's clime,
And thou with eager arms about her twined
Beholdest first her grey eyes growing kind,
Surely, O trembler, thou shalt scarcely then
Forget the Helper of unhappy men."

Milanion raised his head at this last word
For now so soft and kind she seemed to be
No longer of her Godhead was he feared;
Too late he looked, for nothing could he see
But the white image glimmering doubtfully
In the departing twilight cold and grey,
And those three apples on the steps that lay.

These then he caught up quivering with delight,
Yet fearful lest it all might be a dream,
And though aweary with the watchful night,
And sleepless nights of longing, still did deem
He could not sleep; but yet the first sun-beam
That smote the fane across the heaving deep
Shone on him laid in calm untroubled sleep.

But little ere the noontide did he rise,
And why he felt so happy scarce could tell
Until the gleaming apples met his eyes.
Then leaving the fair place where this befell
Oft he looked back as one who loved it well,
Then homeward to the haunts of men 'gan wend
To bring all things unto a happy end.

NOW has the lingering month at last gone by,
Again are all folk round the running place,
Nor other seems the dismal pageantry
Than heretofore, but that another face
Looks o'er the smooth course ready for the race,
For now, beheld of all, Milanion
Stands on the spot he twice has looked upon.

But yet—what change is this that holds the maid?
Does she indeed see in his glittering eye

More than disdain of the sharp shearing blade,
Some happy hope of help and victory?
The others seemed to say, "We come to die,
Look down upon us for a little while,
That dead, we may bethink us of thy smile."

But he—what look of mastery was this
He cast on her? why were his lips so red?
Why was his face so flushed with happiness?
So looks not one who deems himself but dead,
E'en if to death he bows a willing head;
So rather looks a god well pleased to find
Some earthly damsel fashioned to his mind.

Why must she drop her lids before his gaze,
And even as she casts adown her eyes
Redden to note his eager glance of praise,
And wish that she were clad in other guise?
Why must the memory to her heart arise
Of things unnoticed when they first were heard,
Some lover's song, some answering maiden's word?

What makes these longings, vague, without a name,
And this vain pity never felt before,
This sudden languor, this contempt of fame,
This tender sorrow for the time past o'er,
These doubts that grow each minute more and more?
Why does she tremble as the time grows near,
And weak defeat and woeful victory fear?

But while she seemed to hear her beating heart,
Above their heads the trumpet blast rang out
And forth they sprang; and she must play her part;
Then flew her white feet, knowing not a doubt,
Though slackening once, she turned her head about,
But then she cried aloud and faster fled
Than e'er before, and all men deemed him dead.

But with no sound he raised aloft his hand,
And thence what seemed a ray of light there flew
And past the maid rolled on along the sand;
Then trembling she her feet together drew
And in her heart a strong desire there grew
To have the toy; some god she thought had given
That gift to her, to make of earth a heaven.

Then from the course with eager steps she ran,
And in her odorous bosom laid the gold.
But when she turned again, the great-limbed man,
Now well ahead she failed not to behold,
And mindful of her glory waxing cold,
Sprang up and followed him in hot pursuit,
Though with one hand she touched the golden fruit.

Note too, the bow that she was wont to bear
She laid aside to grasp the glittering prize,
And o'er her shoulder from the quiver fair
Three arrows fell and lay before her eyes
Unnoticed, as amidst the people's cries

She sprang to head the strong Milanion,
Who now the turning-post had well nigh won.

But as he set his mighty hand on it
White fingers underneath his own were laid,
And white limbs from his dazzled eyes did flit,
Then he the second fruit cast by the maid,
But she ran on awhile, then as afraid
Wavered and stopped, and turned and made no stay,
Until the globe with its bright fellow lay.

Then, as a troubled glance she cast around
Now far ahead the Argive could she see,
And in her garment's hem one hand she wound
To keep the double prize, and strenuously
Sped o'er the course, and little doubt had she
To win the day, though now but scanty space
Was left betwixt him and the winning place.

Short was the way unto such winged feet,
Quickly she gained upon him till at last
He turned about her eager eyes to meet
And from his hand the third fair apple cast.
She wavered not, but turned and ran so fast
After the prize that should her bliss fulfil,
That in her hand it lay ere it was still.

Nor did she rest, but turned about to win
Once more, an unblest woeful victory—

And yet—and yet—why does her breath begin
To fail her, and her feet drag heavily?
Why fails she now to see if far or nigh
The goal is? why do her grey eyes grow dim?
Why do these tremors run through every limb?

She spreads her arms abroad some stay to find
Else must she fall, indeed, and findeth this,
A strong man's arms about her body twined.
Nor may she shudder now to feel his kiss,
So wrapped she is in new unbroken bliss:
Made happy that the foe the prize hath won.
She weeps glad tears for all her glory done.

SHATTER the trumpet, hew adown the posts!
Upon the brazen altar break the sword,
And scatter incense to appease the ghosts
Of those who died here by their own award.
Bring forth the image of the mighty Lord,
And her who unseen o'er the runners hung,
And did a deed for ever to be sung.

Here are the gathered folk, make no delay,
Open King Schœneus' well-filled treasury,
Bring out the gifts long hid from light of day,
The golden bowls o'erwrought with imagery,

Gold chains, and unguents brought from over sea,
The saffron gown the old Phœnician brought,
Within the temple of the Goddess wrought.

O ye, O damsels, who shall never see
Her, that Love's servant bringeth now to you,
Returning from another victory,
In some cool bower do all that now is due!
Since she in token of her service new
Shall give to Venus offerings rich enow,
Her maiden zone, her arrows, and her bow.

SO when his last word's echo died away,
The growing wind at end of that wild day
Alone they heard, for silence bound them all;
Yea, on their hearts a weight had seemed to fall,
As unto the scarce-hoped felicity
The tale drew round—the end of life so nigh,
The aim so little, and the joy so vain—
For as a child's unmeasured joy brings pain
Unto a grown man holding grief at bay,
So the old fervent story of that day
Brought pain half-sweet, to these: till now the fire
Upon the hearth sent up a flickering spire
Of ruddy flame, as fell the burned-through logs,
And, waked by sudden silence, grey old dogs,
The friends of this or that man, rose and fawned
On hands they knew; withal once more there dawned
The light of common day on those old hearts,
And all were ready now to play their parts,
And take what feeble joy might yet remain
In place of all they once had hoped to gain.

NOW on the second day that these did meet
March was a-dying through soft days and sweet,
Too hopeful for the wild days yet to be;
But in the hall that ancient company,
Not lacking younger folk that day at least,
Softened by spring were gathered at the feast,
And as the time drew on, throughout the hall
A horn was sounded, giving note to all
That they at last the looked-for tale should hear.

Then spake a Wanderer, "O kind hosts and dear,
Hearken a little unto such a tale
As folk with us will tell in every vale
About the yule-tide fire, when the snow
Deep in the passes, letteth men to go
From place to place: now there few great folk be,
Although we upland men have memory
Of ills kings did us; yet as now indeed
Few have much wealth, few are in utter need.
Like the wise ants a kingless, happy folk
We long have been, not galled by any yoke,
But the white leaguer of the winter tide
Whereby all men at home are bound to bide.
—Alas, my folly! how I talk of it,
As though from this place where to-day we sit
The way thereto was short—Ah, would to God
Upon the snow-freed herbage now I trod!
But pardon, sirs; the time goes swiftly by,
Hearken a tale of conquering destiny.

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING.

ARGUMENT.

IT was foretold to a great king, that he who should reign after him should be low-born and poor; which thing came to pass in the end, for all that the king could do.

A KING there was in days of old
Who ruled wide lands, nor lacked for gold,
Nor honour, nor much longed-for praise,
And his days were called happy days,
So peaceable his kingdoms were,
While others wrapt in war and fear
Fell ever unto worse and worse.
Therefore his city was the nurse
Of all that men then had of lore,
And none were driven from his door
That seemed well-skilled in anything;
So of the sages was he king;
And from this learned man and that,
Little by little, lore he gat,
And many a lordless, troubled land
Fell scarce loth to his dreaded hand.

Midst this it chanced that, on a day,
Clad in his glittering gold array,
He held a royal festival;
And nigh him in his glorious hall
Beheld his sages most and least,
Sitting much honoured at the feast.
But mid the faces so well-known,
Of men he well might call his own,
He saw a little wizened man
With face grown rather grey than wan
From lapse of years, beardless was he,
And bald as is the winter tree;
But his two deep-set, glittering eyes
Gleamed at the sight of mysteries
None knew but he; few words he said,
And unto those small heed was paid;
But the king, young, yet old in guile,
Failed not to note a flickering smile
Upon his face, as now and then
He turned him from the learned men
Toward the king's seat, so thought to know
What new thing he might have to show;
And presently, the meat being done,
He bade them bring him to his throne,
And when before him he was come,
He said, "Be welcome to my home;
What is thine art, canst thou in rhyme
Tell stories of the ancient time?
Or dost thou chronicle old wars?

Or know'st thou of the change of stars?
Or seek'st thou the transmuting stone?
Or canst thou make the shattered bone
Grow whole, and dying men live on
Till years like thine at last are won?
Or what thing bring'st thou to me here,
Where nought but men of lore are dear
To me and mine?"

"O King," said he,
"But few things know I certainly,
Though I have toiled for many a day
Along the hard and doubtful way
That bringeth wise men to the grave:
And now for all the years I gave,
To know all things that man can learn,
A few months learned life I earn,
Nor feel much liker to a god
Than when beside my sheep I trod
Upon the thymy, wind-swept down.
Yet am I come unto thy town
To tell thee somewhat that I learned
As on the stars I gazed, and yearned
To cast this weary body off,
With all its chains of mock and scoff
And creeping death—for as I read
The sure decrees with joy and dread,
Somewhat I saw writ down of thee,
And who shall have the sovereignty
When thou art gone."

" Nay," said the King,
" Speak quick and tell me of the thing."
" Sire," said the sage, " thine ancient line
Thou holdest as a thing divine,
So long and undisturbed it is,
But now shall there be end to this,
For surely in my glittering text
I read that he who shall sit next,
On this thine ancient throne and high,
Shall be no better born than I
Whose grandsire none remembereth,
Nor where my father first drew breath."
" Yea," said the King, " and this may be;
Yet, O Sage, ere I credit thee,
Some token certes must thou show,
Or tell me what I think to know,
Alone, among all folk alive;
Then surely great gifts will I give
To thee, and make thee head of all
Who watch the planets rise and fall."
" Bid these stand backward from thy throne,"
The sage said, " then to thee alone
Long hidden matters will I tell;
And then, if thou believest, well—
And if thou dost not—well also;
No gift I ask, but leave to go,
For strange to me is this thy state,
And for thyself, thou well may'st hate
My crabbed age and misery."

"Well," said the King, "let this thing be;
And ye, my masters, stand aback!
For of the fresh air have I lack,
And in my pleasance would I walk
To hearken this grave elder's talk
And gain new lore."
Therewith he rose
And led the way unto a close,
Shaded with grey-leaved olive-trees;
And when they were amidst of these
He turned about and said, "Speak, friend,
And of thy folly make an end,
And take this golden chain therefore."
"Rightly thou namest my weak lore,"
The sage said, "therefore to the end
Be wise, and what the fates may send
Take thou, nor struggle in the net
Wherein thine helpless feet are set!
—Hearken! a year is well-nigh done
Since, at the hottest of the sun,
Stood Antony beneath this tree,
And took a jewelled cup of thee,
And drank swift death in guise of wine;
Since he, most trusted of all thine,
At last too full of knowledge grew,
And chiefly, he of all men knew
How the Earl Marshal Hugh had died,
Since he had drawn him on to ride
Into a bushment of his foes,

To meet death from unnumbered blows."
"Thou knowest that by me he died,"
The King said, "How if now I cried
Help! the magician slayeth me?"
Swiftly should twenty sword-blades be
Clashing within thy ribs, and thou
Nearer to death than even now."
"Not thus, O King, I fear to die,"
The Sage said; "Death shall pass me by
Many a year yet, because perchance,
I fear not aught his clattering dance,
And have enough of weary days.
—But thou—farewell, and win the praise
Of sages, by thy hearkening
With heed to this most certain thing.
Fear not because this thing I know,
For to my grey tower back I go
High raised above the heathy hills
Where the great erne the swift hare kills,
Or stoops upon the new-yeaned lamb;
There almost as a god I am
Unto few folk; who hear thy name
Indeed, but know nought of thy fame,
Nay, scarce if thou be man or beast."
So saying, back unto the feast
He turned, and went adown the hall,
Not heeding any gibe or call;
And left the palace and the town
With face turned toward his windy down.

Back to the hall, too, the King went,
With eyes upon the pavement bent
In pensive thought, delighting not
In riches and his kingly lot;
But thinking how his days began,
And of the lonely souls of man.

But time past, and midst this and that,
The wise man's message he forgat;
And as a king he lived his life,
And took to him a noble wife
Of the kings' daughters, rich and fair.
And they being wed for nigh a year,
And she now growing great with child,
It happed unto the forest wild
This king with many folk must ride
At ending of the summer-tide;
There boar and hart they brought to bay,
And had right noble prize that day;
But when the noon was now long past,
And the thick woods grew overcast,
They roused the mightiest hart of all.
Then loudly 'gan the king to call
Unto his huntsmen, not to leave
That mighty beast for dusk nor eve
Till they had won him; with which word
His horn he blew, and forth he spurred,
Taking no thought of most or least,
But only of that royal beast.

And over rough and smooth he rode,
Nor yet for anything abode,
Till dark night swallowing up the day
With blindness his swift course must stay.
Nor was there with him any one,
So far his fair steed had outrun
The best of all his hunting folk.

So, glancing at the stars that broke
'Twixt the thick branches here and there,
Backward he turned, and peered with care
Into the darkness, but saw nought,
Nor heard his folk, and therewith thought
His bed must be the brake leaves brown.
Then in a while he lighted down,
And felt about a little space,
If he might find a softer place;
But as he groped from tree to tree
Some glimmering light he seemed to see
'Twixt the dark stems, and thither turned,
If yet perchance some wood-fire burned
Within a peasant's hut, where he
Might find, amidst their misery,
Rough food, or shelter at the least.

So, leading on his wearied beast,
Blindly he crept from tree to tree,
Till slowly grew that light to be
The thing he looked for, and he found
A hut on a cleared space of ground,
From whose half-opened door there streamed

The light that erst far off had gleamed.
Then of that shelter was he fain,
But just as he made shift to gain
The open space in front of it,
A shadow o'er the grass did flit,
And on the wretched threshold stood
A big man, with a bar of wood
In his right hand, who seemed as though
He got him ready for a blow;
But ere he spoke the King cried, "Friend,
May God good hap upon thee send,
If thou wilt give me rest this night,
And food according to thy might."

"Nay," said the carle, "my wife lieth
In labour, and is nigh her death;
Nor canst thou enter here at all,
But nearby is my asses' stall,
Who on this night bide in the town;
There, if thou wilt, mayst thou lie down,
And sleep until the dawn of day,
And I will bring thee what I may
Of food and drink."

Then said the King,
"Thanked be thou; neither for nothing
Shalt thou this good deed do to me."

"Nay," said the carle, "let these things be,
Surely I think before the morn,
To be too weary and forlorn
For gold much heart in me to put."

With that he turned, and from the hut
Brought out a lantern, and rye-bread,
And wine, and showed the king a shed,
Strewed with a litter of dry brake:
Withal he muttered, for his sake,
Unto Our Lady some rude prayer,
And turned about and left him there.
So when the rye-bread, nowise fine,
The king had munched, and with green wine
Had quenched his thirst, his horse he tied
Unto a post, and there beside
He fell asleep upon the brake.

But in an hour did he awake,
Astonied with an unnamed fear,
For words were ringing in his ear
Like the last echo of a scream,
"*Take! take!*" but of the vanished dream
No image was there left to him.
Then, trembling sore in every limb,
Did he arise, and drew his sword,
And passed forth on the forest sward,
And cautiously about he crept;
But he heard nought at all, except
Some groaning of the woodman's wife,
And forest sounds well known, but rife
With terror to the lonely soul.
Then he lay down again, to roll
His limbs within his huntsman's cloak;

And slept again, and once more woke
To tremble with that unknown fear,
And other echoing words to hear—
"*Give up! give up!*" nor anything
Showed more why these strange words should ring
About him. Then he sat upright,
Bewildered, gazing through the night,
Until his weary eyes, grown dim,
Showed not the starlit tree-trunks slim
Against the black wood, grey and plain;
And into sleep he sank again,
And woke not soon: but sleeping dreamed
That he awoke, nor other seemed
The place he woke in but that shed,
And there beside his bracken bed
He seemed to see the ancient sage
Shrivelled yet more with untold age,
Who bending down his head to him
Said, with a mocking smile and grim,—
"Take, or give up; what matters it?
This child new-born shall surely sit
Upon thy seat when thou art gone,
And dwelling 'twixt straight walls of stone."
Again the King woke at that word
And sat up, panting and afeard,
And staring out into the night,
Where yet the woods thought not of light;
And fain he was to cast off sleep,
Such visions from his eyes to keep.

Heavy his head grew none the less,
'Twixt 'wildering thoughts and weariness,
And soon he fell asleep once more,
Nor dreamed, nor woke again, before
The sun shone through the forest trees;
And, shivering in the morning breeze,
He blinked with just-awakened eyes,
And pondering on those mysteries,
Unto the woodman's hut he went.

Him he found kneeling down, and bent
In moody grief above a bed,
Whereon his wife lay, stark and dead,
Whose soul near morn had passed away;
And 'twixt the dead and living lay
A new-born man-child, fair and great.
So in the door the King did wait
To watch the man, who had no heed
Of this or that, so sore did bleed
The new-made wound within his heart.
But as the King gazed, for his part
He did but see his threatened foe,
And ever hard his heart did grow
With deadly hate and wilfulness:
And sight of that poor man's distress
Made it the harder, as of nought
But that unbroken line he thought
Of which he was the last: withal
His scornful troubled eyes did fall

Upon that nest of poverty,
Where nought of joy he seemed to see.
On straw the poor dead woman lay;
The door alone let in the day,
Showing the trodden earthen floor,
A board on trestles weak and poor,
Three stumps of tree for stool or chair,
A half-glazed pipkin, nothing fair,
A bowl of porridge by the wife,
Untouched by lips that lacked for life,
A platter and a bowl of wood;
And in the further corner stood
A bow cut from the wych-elm tree,
A holly club, and arrows three
Ill pointed, heavy, spliced with thread.

Ah! soothly, well remembered
Was that unblissful wretched home,
Those four bare walls, in days to come;
And often in the coming years
He called to mind the pattering tears
That, on the rent old sackcloth cast
About the body, fell full fast,
'Twixt half-meant prayers and curses wild,
And that weak wailing of the child,
His threatened dreaded enemy,
The mighty king that was to be.
But as he gazed unsoftened there,
With hate begot of scorn and care,

Loudly he heard a great horn blow,
And his own hunting call did know,
And soon began the shouts to hear
Of his own people drawing near.
Then lifting up his horn, he blew
A long shrill point, but as he threw
His head aback, beheld his folk,
Who from the close-set thicket broke
And o'er the cleared space swiftly passed,
With shouts that he was found at last.
Then turned the carle his doleful face,
And slowly rising in his place,
Drew thwart his eyes his fingers strong,
And on that gay-dressed glittering throng
Gazed stupidly, as still he heard
The name of King; but said no word.
But his guest spoke, "Sirs, well be ye!
This luckless woodman, whom ye see,
Gave me good harbour through the night
And such poor victual as he might;
Therefore shall he have more than gold
For his reward; since dead and cold
His helpmate lies who last night died.
See now the youngling by her side;
Him will I take and rear him so
That he shall no more lie alow
In straw, or from the beech-tree dine.
But rather use white linen fine
And silver plate; and with the sword

Shall learn to serve some King or Lord.
How say'st thou, good man?"
"Sire," he said,
Weeping, but shamefaced,—"Since here dead
She lies, that erst kept house for me,
E'en as thou willest let it be;
Though I had hoped to have a son
To help me get the day's work done.
And now, indeed, forth must he go
If unto manhood he should grow,
And lonely I must wander forth,
To whom east, west, and south, and north
Are all alike: forgive it me
If little thanks I give to thee
Who scarce can thank great God in heaven
For what is left of what was given."
Small heed unto him the King gave,
But trembling in his haste to have
The body of his enemy,
Said to an old squire, "Bring to me
The babe, and give the good man this
Wherewith to gain a little bliss,
In place of all his troubles gone,
Nor need he now be long alone."
The carle's rough face, at clink of gold,
Lit up, though still did he behold
The wasted body lying there;
But stooping, a rough box, foursquare,
Made of old wood and lined with hay,

Wherein the helpless infant lay,
He raised, and gave it to the squire
Who on the floor cast down his hire,
Nor sooth dared murmur aught the while,
But turning smiled a grim hard smile
To see the carle his pieces count
Still weeping: so did all men mount
And turning round into the wood
Forgat him and his drearihood,
And soon were far off from the hut.

Then coming out, the door he shut
Behind him, and adown a glade,
Towards a rude hermitage he made
To fetch the priest unto his need,
To bury her and say her bede—
So when all things that he might do
Were done aright, heavy with woe,
He left the woodland hut behind
To take such chance as he might find
In other lands, forgetting all
That in that forest did befall.

But through the wild wood rode the King,
Moody and thinking on the thing,
Nor free from that unreasoning fear;
Till now, when they had drawn anear
The open country, and could see
The road run on from close to lea,

And lastly by a wooden bridge
A long way from that heathy ridge
Cross over a deep lowland stream—
Then in his eyes there came a gleam,
And his hand fell upon his sword,
And turning round to squire and lord
He said, "Ride sirs, the way is clear,
Nor of my people have I fear,
Nor do my foes range over wide;
And for myself fain would I ride
Right slowly homewards through the fields
Noting what this and that one yields;
While by my squire who bears the child
Lightly my way shall be beguiled.
For some nurse now he needs must have
This tender life of his to save;
And doubtless by the stream there is
Some house where he may dwell in bliss,
Till he grow old enough to learn
How gold and glory he may earn;
And grow, perchance, to be a lord."
With downcast eyes he spoke that word;
But forth they galloped speedily,
And he drew rein and stood to see
Their green coats lessening as they went.
This man unto the other bent,
Until mid dust and haze at last
Into a wavering mass they passed;
Then 'twixt the hedgerows vanished quite

Just told of by the dust-cloud white
Rolled upwards 'twixt the elm-trunks slim.

Then turned the king about to him
Who held the child, noting again
The thing wherein he first had lain,
And on one side of it could see
A lion painted hastily
In red upon a ground of white,
As though of old it had been dight
For some lord's rough-wrought palisade;
But naked 'mid the hay was laid
The child, and had no mark or sign.
Then said the king, "My ancient line
Thou and thy sires through good and ill
Have served, and unto thee my will
Is law enough from day to day;
Ride nigh me hearkening what I say."
He shook his rein and side by side
Down through the meadows did they ride,
And opening all his heart, the king
Told to the old man everything
Both of the sage, and of his dream;
Withal drawn nigh unto the stream,
He said, "Yet this shall never be,
For surely as thou lovest me,
Adown this water shall he float
With this rough box for ark and boat,
Then if mine old line he must spill

There let God save him if he will,
While I in no case shed his blood."
"Yea," said the squire, "thy words are good,
For the whole sin shall lie on me,
Who greater things would do for thee
If need there were; yet note, I pray,
It may be he will 'scape this day
And live; and what wouldst thou do then
If thou shouldst meet him among men?
I counsel thee to let him go
Since sure to nought thy will shall grow."
"Yea, yea," the king said, "let all be
That may be, if I once but see
This ark whirl in the eddies swift
Or tangled in the autumn drift
And wrong side up:" but with that word
Their horse-hoofs on the plank he heard,
And swift across the bridge he rode,
And nigh the end of it abode,
Then turned to watch the old squire stop,
And leaning o'er the bridge-rail drop
The luckless child; he heard withal
A muttered word and splashing fall
And from the wakened child a cry,
And saw the cradle hurrying by,
Whirled round and sinking, but as yet
Holding the child, nor overset.
Now somewhat, soothly at the sight
Did the king doubt if he outright

Had rid him of his feeble foe,
But frowning did he turn to go
Unto his home, nor knew indeed
How better he might help his need;
And as unto his house he rode
Full little care for all he showed,
Still bidding Samuel the squire
Unto his bridle-hand ride nigher,
To whom he talked of careless things,
As unto such will talk great kings.
But when unto his palace gate
He came at last, thereby did wait
The chamberlain with eager eyes
Above his lips grown grave with lies,
In haste to tell him that the queen,
While in the wild-wood he had been,
Had borne a daughter unto him
Strong, fair of face, and straight of limb.
So well at ease and glad thereat
His troubled dream he nigh forgat,
His troubled waking, and the ride
Unto the fateful river-side;
Or thought of all as little things
Unmeet to trouble souls of kings.

So passed the days, so passed the years
In such-like hopes, and such-like fears,
And such-like deeds in field and hall
As unto royal men befall,

And fourteen years have passed away
Since on the huddled brake he lay
And dreamed that dream, remembered now
Once and again, when slow and slow
The minutes of some sleepless night
Crawl toward the dawning of the light.

Remembered not on this sweet morn
When to the ringing of the horn,
Jingle of bits and mingled shout
Toward that same stream he rideth out
To see his grey-winged falcons fly.
So long he rode he drew anigh
A mill upon the river's brim,
That seemed a goodly place to him,
For o'er the oily smooth millhead
There hung the apples growing red,
And many an ancient apple-tree
Within the orchard could he see,
While the smooth millwalls white and black
Shook to the great wheel's measured clack,
And grumble of the gear within;
While o'er the roof that dulled that din
The doves sat crooning half the day,
And round the half-cut stack of hay
The sparrows fluttered twittering.
There smiling stayed the joyous king,
And since the autumn noon was hot
Thought good anigh that pleasant spot

To dine that day, and therewith sent
To tell the miller his intent:
Who held the stirrup of the king,
Bareheaded, joyful at the thing,
While from his horse he lit adown,
Then led him o'er an elm-beam brown,
New cut in February tide
That crossed the stream from side to side,
So underneath the apple trees
The king sat careless, well at ease
And ate and drank right merrily.
To whom the miller drew anigh
Among the courtiers, bringing there
Such as he could of country fare,
Green yellowing plums from off his wall,
Wasp-bitten pears, the first to fall
From off the wavering spire-like tree,
Junkets, and cream and fresh honey.
Smiling the king regarded him,
For he was round-paunched, short of limb,
Red-faced, with long, lank flaxen hair;
But with him was a boy, right fair,
Grey-eyed, and yellow-haired, most like
Unto some Michael who doth strike
The dragon on a minster wall,
So sweet-eyed was he, and withal
So fearless of all things he seemed.
But when he saw him the king deemed
He scarce could be the miller's kin,

And laughing said, "Hast thou within
Thy dusty mill the dame who bore
This stripling in the days of yore,
For fain were I to see her now,
If she be liker him than thou?"

"Sire," said the miller, "that may be
And thou my dame shall surely see;
But for the stripling, neither I
Begat him, nor my wife did lie
In labour when the lad was born,
But as an outcast and forlorn
We found him fourteen years to-day,
So quick the time has passed away."

Then the king, hearkening what he said,
A vanished day remembered,
And troubled grew his face thereat;
But while he thought of this and that
The man turned from him and was gone
And by him stood the lad alone;
At whom he gazed, and as their eyes
Met, a great horror 'gan arise
Within his heart, and back he shrank
And shuddering a deep draught he drank,
Scarce knowing if his royal wine
He touched, or juice of some hedge-vine.

But as his eyes he lifted up
From off his jewelled golden cup,
Once more the miller drew anigh,

By whom his wife went timidly
Bearing some burden in her hand;
So when before him she did stand
And he beheld her worn and old,
And black-haired, then that hair of gold,
Grey eyes, firm lips, and round cleft chin,
Brought stronger memory of his sin.

But the carle spake, "Dame, tell the King
How this befell, a little thing
The thoughts of such great folk to hold,
Speak out, and fear not to be bold."

"My tale," she said, "is short enow,
For this day fourteen years ago
Along this river-side I rode
Ffom market to our poor abode,
Where we dwelt far from other men,
Since thinner was the country then
Than now it is; so as I went
And wearied o'er my panniers bent,
From out the stream a feeble cry
I heard, and therewith presently,
From off my mule's back could I see
This boy who standeth here by thee,
A naked, new-born infant, laid
In a rough ark that had been stayed
By a thick tangled bed of weed;
So pitying the youngling's need,
Dismounting, did I wade for him
Waist deep, whose ark now scarce did swim;

And he, with cold, and misery,
And hunger, was at point to die.
"Withal, I bare him to the mill
And cherished him, and had good will
To bring the babe up as mine own;
Since childless were we and alone,
And no one came to father it.
So oft have I rejoiced to sit
Beside the fire and watch him play.
And now, behold him!—but some day
I look to lose him, for, indeed,
I deem he comes of royal seed,
Unmeet for us: and now, my lord,
Have you heard every foolish word
About my son—this boy—whose name
Is Michael soothly, since he came
To us this day nigh Michaelmas.
—See, sire, the ark wherein he was!
Which I have kept."
Therewith she drew
A cloth away; but the King knew,
Long ere she moved, what he should see,
Nor looked, but seeming carelessly
Leaned on the board and hid his eyes.
But at the last did he arise
And saw the painted lion red,
Not faded, well remembered;
Withal he thought, "And who of these
Were with me then amongst the trees

To see this box;" but presently
He thought again that none but he
And the grey squire, old Samuel,
That painting could have noted well.
Since Samuel his cloak had cast
About it, and therewith had past
Throughout the forest on that day,
And not till all were well away
Had drawn it off before the King.
But changed and downcast at the thing
He left the lovely autumn place,
Still haunted by the new-found face
Of his old foe, and back he rode
Unto his ancient rich abode,
Forcing but dismal merriment
As midst his smiling lords he went;
Who yet failed not to note his mood,
So changed: and some men of the wood
Remembered them, but said not aught,
Yea, trembled lest their hidden thought
Some bird should learn, and carry it.

The morrow come, the King did sit
Alone, to talk with Samuel,
Who yet lived, gathering wage for hell.
He from the presence in a while
Came forth, and with his ugly smile
He muttered, "Well betide me, then,
St. Peter! they are lucky men

Who serve no kings, since they indeed
May damn themselves each for his need.
And will not he outlive this day
Whom the deep water could not slay,
Ere yet his lips had tasted food?"
With that a horse, both strong and good,
He gat of the king's equerry,
And toward the mill rode speedily.

There Michael by the mill-tail lay,
Watching the swift stream snatch away
His float from midst the careless dace;
But thinking of the thin, dark face,
That yesterday all men he saw
Gaze at with seeming love and awe;
Nor had he, wondering at the lords,
Lost one word of the housewife's words;
And still he noted that the King
Beheld him as a wondrous thing,
Strange to find there: so in his heart
He thought to play some royal part
In this wild play of life, and made
Stories, wherein great words he said,
And did great deeds in desperate fight.
But midst these thoughts there came in sight
He who had carried him of yore,
From out the woodman's broken door,
Dressed like a king's man, with fine gold
Touching his hard brown hands and old,

So was his sleeve embroidered;
A plumed hat had he on his head,
And by his side a cutting sword
Fit for the girdle of a lord;
And round his neck a knife he bore,
Whose hilt was well enamelled o'er,
With green leaves on a golden ground,
Whose stem a silver scroll enwound;
Charged with those letters, writ in black,
Strike! for no dead man cometh back!

The boy gazed at him earnestly,
With beating heart, as he drew nigh.
And when at last he drew his rein
Beside him, thought that not in vain
His dream might be. But Samuel
Below his breath said; "Surely well
Shalt thou fulfil thy destiny;
And, spite of all, thou wilt not die
Till thou hast won the arched crown?"

But with that word he lighted down,
And said aloud, "Lad, tell to me
Where the good miller I may see,
For from the King I come to-day,
And have a word to him to say;
I think, indeed, concerning thee;
For surely thou his lad must be."

Then Michael leapt up, nor took heed
Of how the nibbling dace might feed
Upon the loose ends of his bait;

"Fair sir," he said, "my sire doth wait
Until men bring his mare from grass,
For to the good town will he pass,
Since he has need of household gear;
Follow, my lord, the place is here."
Withal, the good steed being made fast,
Unto the other side they passed,
And by the door the miller found,
Who bowed before him to the ground,
And asked what he would have him do—
Then from his bosom Samuel drew
A scroll, and said, "Good friend, read here,
And do my bidding without fear
Of doing ill."
"Sir," said the man,
"But little lettered skill I can;
Let my dame come, for she can read
Well written letters at good need."
"Nay, friend," he said, "suffice it thee
This seal at the scroll's end to see,
My Lord the King's; and hear my word,
That I come hither from my lord
Thy foundling lad to have away
To serve the King from this same day."
Downcast the miller looked thereat,
And twisting round his dusty hat,
Said, "Well, my lord, so must it be,
Nor is he aught akin to me,
Nor seems so: none the less would I

Have left him, when I came to die,
All things I have, with this my mill,
Wherein he hath no 'prentice skill,
Young as he is: and surely here
Might he have lived, with little fear,
A life of plenty and of bliss—
Near by, too, a fair maid there is,
I looked should be good wife to him."

Meanwhile young Michael's head 'gan swim
With thoughts of noble life and praise;
And he forgat the happy days
Wherein the happy dreams he dreamed
That now so near fulfilment seemed;
And, looking through the open mill,
Stared at the grey and windy hill
And saw it not, but some fair place
Made strange with many a changing face,
And all his life that was to be.
But Samuel, laughing scornfully,
Said, "O good soul, thou thinkest then
This is a life for well-born men,
As our lord deems this youngling is—
Tell me good lad, where lies thy bliss?"
But Michael turned shamefaced and red,
Waked from his dream, and stammering said,
"Fair sir, my life is sweet and good,
And John, the ranger of the wood,
Saith that I draw so good a bow,

That I shall have full skill enow
Ere many months have passed me by
To join the muster, and to try
To win the bag of florins white,
That folk, on Barnaby the bright,
Shoot for within the market town.
Sir, please you to look up and down
The weedy reaches of our stream,
And note the bubbles of the bream,
And see the great chub take the fly,
And watch the long pike basking lie
Outside the shadow of the weed.
Withal there come unto our need
Woodcock and snipe when swallows go;
And now the water-hen flies low
With feet that well nigh touch the reeds,
And plovers cry about the meads,
And the stares chatter; certes, sir,
It is a fair place all the year."
Eyeing him grimly, Samuel said,
"Thou show'st churl's breeding, by my head,
In foul despite of thy fair face!
Take heart, for to a better place
Thou goest now.—Miller, farewell,
Nor need'st thou to the neighbours tell
The noble fortunes of the lad;
For, certes, he shall not be glad
To know them in a year or twain.
Yet shall thy finding not be vain,

And thou mayst bless it; for behold
This bag wherein is store of gold;
Take it and let thy hinds go play,
And grind no corn for many a day,
For it would buy thy mill and thee."
He turned to go, but pensively
Stood Michael, for his broken dream
Doubtful and far away did seem
Amid the squire's rough mockeries;
And tears were gathering in his eyes.
But the kind miller's rough farewell
Rang in his ears; and Samuel
Stamped with his foot and plucked his sleeve;
So therewithal he turned to leave
His old abode, the quiet place,
Trembling, with wet and tearful face.
But even as he turned there came
From out the house the simple dame
And cast rough arms about the lad,
Saying, "For that I have been glad
By means of thee this many a day,
My mourning heart this hour doth pay.
But fair son, may'st thou live in bliss,
And die in peace; remembering this,
When thou art come to high estate,
That in our house, early and late,
The happy house that shall be sad,
Thou hadst the best of all we had
And love unfeigned from us twain,

Whose hearts thou madest young again,
Hearts that the quicker old shall grow
Now thou art gone."
"Good dame, enow,"
Quoth Samuel, "the day grows late,
And sure the king for meat shall wait
Until he see this new-found lord."
He strode away upon that word;
And half ashamed, and half afeard,
Yet eager as his dream he neared,
Shyly the lad went after him.
They crossed the stream and by its brim
Both mounted the great warhorse grey,
And without word they rode away.

But as along the river's edge
They went, and brown birds in the sedge
Twittered their sweet and formless tune
In the fair autumn afternoon,
And reach by reach the well-known stream
They passed, again the hopeful dream
Of one too young to think death near,
Who scarce had learned the name of fear
Remorseful memories put to flight;
Lovely the whole world showed and bright.
Nor did the harsh voice rouse again
The thought of mockery or of pain,
For other thoughts held Samuel.
So, riding silently and well,

They reached at last the dusty road
That led unto the King's abode.
But Samuel turned away his face
Therefrom, and at a steady pace
The great horse thundered o'er the bridge,
And made on toward the heathy ridge,
Wherefrom they rode that other day.
But Michael, noting well the way,
Why thus they went, fell wondering,
And said aloud, "Dwells then the King,
Fair sir, as now within the wood?"

"Young fool, where that it seems him good
He dwelleth," quoth old Samuel,
"And now it pleaseth him to dwell
With the black monks across the wood."

Withal he muttered in his hood,
"Curst be the King, and thee also,
Who thrust me out such deeds to do;
When I should bide at home to pray,
Who draw so nigh my ending day."
So saying forth his horse he spurred
And to himself said yet this word,
"Yea, yea, and of all days forlorn
God curse the day when I was born."

Therewith he groaned; yet saying thus
His case seemed hard and piteous,
When he remembered how of old
Another tale he might have told.

So as each thought his own thoughts still,

The horse began to breast the hill,
And still they went on higher ground,
Until as Michael turned him round
He saw the sunny country-side
Spread out before him far and wide,
Golden amidst its waning green,
Joyous with varied life unseen.
Meanwhile from side to side of them
The trees began their way to hem,
As still he gazed from tree to tree,
And when he turned back presently
He saw before him like a wall
Uncounted tree trunks dim and tall.
Then with their melancholy sound
The odorous spruce woods met around
Those wayfarers, and when he turned
Once more, far off the sunlight burned
In star-like spots, while from o'erhead,
Dim twilight through the boughs was shed.
Not there as yet had Michael been,
Nor had he left the meadows green
Dotted about with spreading trees,
And fresh with sun and rain and breeze,
For those mirk woods, and still his eyes
Gazed round about for mysteries.
Since many an old wife's tale he knew;
Huge woodcutters in raiment blue,
The remnant of a mighty race,
The ancient masters of the place,

And hammering trolls he looked to see,
And dancers of the faërie,
Who, as the ancient stories told,
In front were lovely to behold,
But empty shells seen from behind.

So on they rode until the wind
Had died out, stifled by the trees,
And Michael 'mid those images
Of strange things made alive by fear,
Grew drowsy in the forest drear;
Nor noted how the time went past
Until they nigh had reached at last
The borders of the spruce-tree wood;
And with a tingling of the blood
Samuel bethought him of the day
When turned about the other way
He carried him he rode with now.
For the firs ended on the brow
Of a rough gravelly hill, and there
Lay a small valley nowise fair
Beneath them, clear at first of all
But brake, till amid rushes tall
Down in the bottom alders grew
Crabbed and rough; and winding through
The clayey mounds a brook there was
Oozy and foul, half choked with grass.
There now the Squire awhile drew rein,
And noted how the ground again

Rose up upon the other side,
And saw a green glade opening wide
'Twixt oaks and hollies, and he knew
Full well what place it led unto;
Withal he heard the bittern's boom,
And though without the fir-wood's gloom
They now were come, yet red and low
The sun above the trees did show,
And in despite of hardihead,
The old squire had a mortal dread
Of lying in the wood alone
When that was done that should be done.

Now Michael, wakened by the wind,
Clutched tighter at the belt behind,
And with wide eyes was staring round,
When Samuel said, "Get to the ground,
My horse shall e'en sink deep enow,
Without thy body, in this slough;
And haste thee, or we both shall lie
Beneath the trees, and be as dry
As autumn dew can make us. Haste!
The time is short for thee to waste."

Then from the horse the boy did glide,
And slowly down the valley side
They went, and Michael, wakened now,
Sang such rude songs as he might know,
Grown fresh and joyous of his life;
While Samuel, clutching at the knife
About his neck that hung, again

Down in the bottom tightened rein,
And turning, in a hoarse voice said,
"My girths are loosening, by my head!
Come nigh and draw them tighter, lad."
Then Michael stayed his carol glad,
And noting little in his mirth
The other's voice, unto the girth
Without a word straight set his hand:
But as with bent head he did stand,
Straining to tighten what was tight,
In Samuel's hand the steel flashed bright,
And fell, deep smitten in his side,
Then, leaping back, the poor lad cried,
As if for help, and staggering fell,
With wide eyes fixed on Samuel;
Who none the less grown deadly pale,
Lit down, lest that should not avail
To slay him, and beside him knelt,
And since his eyes were closed now, felt
His heart that beat yet: therewithal
His hand upon the knife did fall.
But, ere his fingers clutched it well,
Far off he seemed to hear a bell,
And trembling knelt upright again,
And listening, listened not in vain,
For clear he heard a tinkling sound.
Then to his horse from off the ground
He leapt, nor reasoned with his dread,
But thought the angel of the dead

Was drawing nigh the slayer to slay,
Ere scarce the soul had passed away.
One dreadful moment yet he heard
That bell, then like a madman spurred
His noble horse; that maddened too,
The close-set fir-wood galloped through,
Not stayed by any stock or stone,
Until the furious race being done,
Anigh the bridge he fell down dead;
And Samuel, mazed with guilt and dread,
Wandered afoot throughout the night,
But came, at dawning of the light,
Half-dead unto the palace gate.

There till the opening did he wait;
Then, by the King's own signet-ring,
He gained the chamber of the king,
And painfully what he had done
He told, and how the thing had gone.
And said withal: "Yet is he dead,
And surely that which made my dread
Shall give thee joy: for doubt not aught
That bell the angels to him brought,
That he in Abraham's breast might lie —
So ends, O King, the prophecy."

Nathless the King scowled, ill content,
And said, "I deemed that I had sent
A man of war to do my will,
Who lacked for neither force nor skill,
And thou com'st with a woman's face,

Bewildered with thy desperate race,
And made an idiot with thy fear,
Nor bring'st me any token here!"
Therewith he rose and gat away,
But brooding on it through that day,
Thought that all things went not so ill
As first he deemed, and that he still
Might leave his old line flourishing.
Therewith both gold and many a thing
Unto old Samuel he gave,
But thereby failed his life to save;
Who, not so old in years as sin,
Died ere the winter, and within
The minster choir was laid asleep,
With carven saints his head to keep.

And so the days and years went by,
And still in great felicity
The King dwelt, wanting only this—
A son wherewith to share his bliss,
And reign when he was dead and gone.
Nor had he daughter, save that one
Born on the night when Michael first,
Forlorn, alone, and doubly cursed,
Felt on him this world's bitter air.
This daughter, midst fair maids most fair,
Was not yet wed, though at this time,
Being come unto her maiden's prime,
She looked upon her eighteenth May.

Midst this her mother passed away,
Not much lamented of the King,
Who had the thought of marrying
Some dame more fertile, and who sent
A wily man with this intent
To spy the countries out and find
Some great king's daughter, wise and kind,
And fresh, and fair, in face and limb,
In all things a fit mate for him.
So in short time it came to pass
Again the King well wedded was,
And hoped once more to have a son.
And when this fair dame he had won,
A year in peace he dwelt with her,
Until the time was drawing near
When first his eyes beheld that foe
He deemed was dead these years ago.
Now at that time, as custom was,
His daughter was about to pass
Unto a distant house of his,
Some king had built for worldly bliss
In ancient days: there, far removed
From courts or towns, the dame he loved
The dead king had been wont to see
Play mid the summer greenery,
Or like Erigone of old
Stand in the vineyards girt with gold,
To queen it o'er the vintagers,
Half worshipping that face of hers.

Long years agone these folk were passed,
Their crimes forgotten, or else cas
Into the glowing crucible
Of time, that tempers all things well,
That maketh pleasure out of pain,
And out of ruin golden gain;
Nathless, unshaken still, there stood
The towers and ramparts red as blood;
Wherein their lives had passed away;
And still the lovely gardens lay
About them, changed, but smiling still,
As in past time, on good or ill.
Thither the Princess Cecily
Must go awhile in peace to be;
For now, midst care, and doubt, and toil,
Proud words drawn back, and half-healed broil,
The King had found one meet to wed
His daughter, of great goodlihead,
Wealth, and unbroken royalty.
And now he said to her, when she
Was setting out for that fair place,
"O daughter, thou shalt see my face
Before a month is fully gone,
Nor wilt thou see me then alone;
For that man shall be with me then,
Whom I have chosen from all men
To give my dearest treasure to.
Most fain he is to look on you,
Nor needst thou fear him for thy part,

Who holdeth many a woman's heart
As the net holds the silvery fish.
Farewell—and all things thou mayst wish
I pray God grant thee."

Therewithal
He kissed her, and from out the hall
She passed, not shamefaced, or afraid
Of what might happen; though, indeed,
Her heart of no man's heart had need
To make her happy as she thought.

Ever the new sun daily brought
Fresh joy of life to her bedside,
The world before her open wide
Was spread, a place for joy and bliss.
Her lips had trembled with no kiss,
Wherewith love slayeth fear and shame;
Her grey eyes conscious of no blame,
Beheld unmoved the eyes of men;
Her hearing grew no dimmer when
Some unused footstep she might hear;
And unto no man was she dear,
But as some goddess might have been
When Greek men worshipped many a queen.

Now with her armed folk forth she rode
Unto that ancient fair abode,
And while the lark sung o'er the corn,
Love gilded not the waning morn;

And when the sun rose high above,
High thoughts she thought, but not of love;
And when that sun the world did leave,
He left no love to light the eve.
The moon no melancholy brought,
The dawn no vain, remorseful thought.
But all untroubled her sweet face
Passed 'neath the gate of that old place,
And there her bridegroom she abode.

But scarce was she upon the road
Ere news unto the King was brought
That Peter, the old abbot, sought
To see him, having newly come
From the wild place that was his home
Across the forest; so the King
Bade him to enter, well willing
To hear what he might have to say;
Who, entering the hall straightway,
Had with him an old, reverend man,
The Sub-prior, father Adrian,
And five monks more, and therewithal
Ten of his folk, stout men and tall,
Who bore armed staves and coats of fence.
So, when he came to audience,
He prayed the King of this or that,
Whereof my tale-teller forgat,
And graciously the King heard all,
And said at last, "Well, what may fall,

Thou go'st not hence, fair lord, to-day;
Unless in vain a king must pray,
Thou and thy monks shall eat with me;
While feast thine axe-men merrily."

Withal, he eyed the abbot's folk
In careless mood, then once more spoke,
"Tall men thou feedest, by the rood!
Lord Abbot, come they from the wood?
Dwell many more such thereabout?
Fain were I such should swell the shout
When I am armed, and rank meets rank.

But as he spoke his loud voice sank
Wavering, nor heard he aught at all
Of the faint noises of the hall,
Or what the monk in answer said;
For, looking from a steel-clad head,
Those eyes again did he behold,
That erst from 'neath the locks of gold
Kindly and bold, but soft with awe,
Beneath the apple-boughs he saw.

But when for sure this thing he knew
Pale to the very lips he grew.
Till gathering heart within a while
With the faint semblance of a smile,
He seemed to note the Abbot's words
That he heard not; then from the lords
He turned, and facing Michael said,
"Raise up the steel cap from thine head,
That I may see if thou look'st bold;

Methinks, I know thy face of old,
Whence com'st thou?"
Michael lifted straight
From off his brow the steel cap's weight,
And showed the bright locks curling round
His fresh and ruddy face, sun-browned,
And in a voice clear as a bell,
Told all his story, till he fell
Sore wounded in that dismal vale,
And said withal, "My lord, the tale
Of what came after, none knoweth
Better than he, who, from ill death
Saved me that tide, and made me man,
My lord, the sub-prior Adrian."
"Speak on then, father," quoth the King,
Making as he was still hearkening.
"My lord," said Adrian, "I, who then
Was but a server of poor men,
Outside our Abbey walls, one day
Was called by one in poor array,
A charcoal-burner's lad, who said
That soon his father would be dead,
And that of all things he would have
His rights, that he his soul might save.
I made no tarrying at that word,
But took between mine hands the Lord,
And bade the boy bear forth the bell;
For though few folk there were to tell
Who passed that way, nathless, I trow

The beasts were glad that news to know.
" Well, by the pinewood's skirts we went
While through its twilight the bell sent
A heavenly tinkling; but the lad
'Gan telling me of fears he had
Of elves who dwell within the wood.
I chid him thereat, as was good,
Bidding him note Whom in mine hands
I held, The Ransom of all Lands.
But as the firwood's dim twilight
Waxed into day, and fair and bright
The evening sun showed through the trees,
Our ears fanned by the evening breeze,
The galloping of horse-hoofs heard,
Wherewith my page hung back afeard
Of elves and such-like; but I said,
'Wilt thou thy father shouldst be dead
Ere we can reach him? Oh my son,
Fear not that aught can stay This One.'
" Therewith I smote my mule, and he
Ran forward with me hastily
As fearing to be left behind.
Well, as we went, what should we find
Down by the stream, but this my son,
Who seemed as though his days were done;
For in his side a knife there stood
Wherefrom ran out a stream of blood,
Soaking the grass and water-mint;
Then, I dismounting, we by dint

Of all our strength, the poor youth laid
Upon my mule, and down a glade
Of oaks and hollies then we passed,
And reached the woodman's home at last;
A poor hut, built of wattled wood,
And by its crooked gable stood
A ruinous shed, unroofed and old
That beasts of burden once did hold.
— Thyself, my lord, mayst know it well,
Since thereabout the wild swine dwell;
And hart, and hind, and roe are there —
So the lad's wounds I staunched with care
Forthwith, and then the man I shrived,
Who none the less got well and lived
For many a day: then back I went
And the next day our leech I sent
With drugs to tend upon the lad.
Who soon was as he ne'er had had
A hurt at all: and he being well
We took him in our house to dwell,
And taught him letters, and, indeed,
Before long, Latin could he read
As well as I; but hath no will
To turn unto religion still.
Yet is he good and doth no wrong;
And being thereto both hale and strong,
My lord, the Abbot, sayeth of him,
'He shall serve God with heart and limb,
Not heart and voice.' Therefore, my lord,

Thou seest him armed with spear and sword
For their defence who feed him still,
Teach him, and guard his soul from ill.
Ho, Michael! hast thou there with thee
The fair-wrought knife I first did see
Deep in thy side?—there, show it now
Unto the King, that he may know.
Our tale is not a fabled thing."

Withal the King, as one listening,
With his thin, anxious face and pale,
Sat leaning forward through this tale,
Scarce noting here and there a word.
But all being told, at last he heard
His own voice changed, and harsh, and low,
That said, "Fair lord, I fain would know,
Since this your man at arms seems true,
What thing will he be worth to you;
For better had he wear my rose
Than loiter in your Abbey-close,
Poring o'er books no man can read."

"O sire!" the monk said, "if your need
Be great of such men, let him go;
My men-at-arms need make no show
Of fairness, nor should ladies miss,
E'en as thou say'st, such men as this."

Laughing he spoke; the King the while,
His pale face puckering to a smile;
Then, as in some confused dream,
In Michael's hand he saw the gleam

Of that same steel remembered well,
The gift he gave to Samuel;
Drawn from his father's ancient chest
To do that morn his own behest.
And as he now beheld its sheen,
The twining stem of gold and green,
The white scroll with the letters black,—
Strike! for no dead man cometh back!
He hardened yet his heart once more,
And grown unhappy as before,
When last he had that face in sight,
Brought now the third time to the light,
Once more grew treacherous, fierce, and fell.
Now was the Abbot feasted well
With all his folk, then went away,
But Michael clad in rich array
Became the king's man, and was thought
By all most happy to be brought
Unto such hopeful fair estate.

For ten days yet the King did wait,
Which past, for Michael did he send,
And he being come, said to him, "Friend,
Take now this letter from my hand
And go unto our southern land;
My captain Hugh shall go with thee
For one day's journey, then shall he
Tell thee which way thou hast to ride;
The third day thence about noontide

If thou dost well, thou shouldst be close
Unto my Castle of the Rose
Where dwells my daughter; needs it is
That no man living should see this
Until that thou within my wall
Hast given it to the seneschal;
Be wise and wary then, that thou
Mayst think of this that happeneth now
As birthday to thine high estate."
So said he, knowing not that fate
Was dealing otherwise than he.
But Michael going, presently
Met Hugh, a big man rough and black,
And who of nought but words had lack,
With him he mounted, and set forth
And daylong rode on from the north.
Now if the King had hope that Hugh
Some deed like Samuel's might do
I know not, certes nought he said
To that hard heart and narrow head,
Who knew no wiles but wiles of war,
And was as true as such men are;
Yet had there been a tale to tell
If Michael had not held him well,
And backward still the wrath had turned
Wherewith his heart not seldom burned
At scornful words his fellow said.
At last they reached cross ways that led
One west, one southward still, whereat

Hugh, taking off his feathered hat,
Bowed low in scorn, and said, "Fair sir,
Unto the westward must I spur,
While you go southward, soon to get
I doubt not, an earl's coronet;
Farewell, my lord, and yet beware
Thou dost not at my lady stare
Too hard, lest thou shouldst plumb the moat,
Or have a halter round thy throat."
But Michael to his scoff said nought,
But upon high things set his thought
As his departing hooves he heard.
And still betwixt the hedgerows spurred,
And when the twilight was o'erpast
At a small inn drew rein at last,
And slept that night as such folk can;
And while next morn the thrushes ran
Their first course through the autumn dew
The gossamers did he dash through,
And on his way rode steadily
The live-long day, nor yet was he
Alone, as well might be that day
Since a fair town was in his way,
Stout hinds he passed, and yeomen good,
Some friar in his heavy hood,
And well-coifed housewives mounted high
Above their maunds, while merrily
The well-shod damsel trudged along
Beside them, sending forth some song

As little taught as is a bird's;
And good men, good wives, priests, and herds,
And merry maids failed not to send
Good wishes for his journey's end
Unto him as still on he sped,
Free from all evil thoughts or dread.

Withal again the day went by,
And in that city's hostelry
He slept, and by the dawn of day
Next morn again was on his way,
And leaving the scarce wakened street
The newly risen sun did greet
With cheerful heart. His way wound on
Still up and up till he had won
Up to a great hill's chalky brow,
Whence looking back he saw below
The town spread out, church, square, and street,
And baily, crawling up the feet
Of the long yew-besprinkled hill;
And in the fragrant air and still,
Seeming to gain new life from it,
The doves from roof to roof did flit:
The early fires sent up their smoke
That seemed to him to tell of folk
New wakened unto great delight:
For he upon that morning bright,
So joyous felt, so free from pain,
He seemed as he were born again

Into some new immortal state
That knew no envy, fear, or hate.
Now the road turned to his left hand
And led him through a table-land,
Windy and barren of all grain;
But where a hollow specked the plain
The yew-trees hugged the sides of it,
And 'mid them did the woodlark flit
Or sang well-sheltered from the wind,
And all about the sheep did find
Sweet grass, the while the shepherd's song
Rang clear as Michael sped along.
Long time he rode, till suddenly,
When now the sun was broad and high,
From out a hollow where the yew
Still guarded patches of the dew,
He found at last that he had won
That highland's edge, and gazed upon
A valley that beneath the haze
Of that most fair of autumn days,
Showed glorious; fair with golden sheaves,
Rich with the darkened autumn-leaves,
Gay with the water-meadows green,
The bright blue streams that lay between,
The miles of beauty stretched away
From that bleak hill-side bare and grey,
Till white cliffs over slopes of vine,
Drew 'gainst the sky a broken line.
And twixt the vineyards and the stream

Michael saw gilded spirelets gleam;
For, hedged with many a flowery close,
There lay the Castle of the Rose,
His hurried journey's aim and end.

Then downward he began to wend,
And 'twixt the flowery hedges sweet
He heard the hook smite down the wheat,
And murmur of the unseen folk;
But when he reached the stream that broke
The golden plain, but leisurely
He passed the bridge, for he could see
The masters of that ripening realm,
Cast down beneath an ancient elm
Upon a little strip of grass,
From hand to hand the pitcher pass,
While on the turf beside them lay
The ashen-handled sickles grey,
The matters of their cheer between:
Slices of white cheese, specked with green,
And greenstriped onions and ryebread,
And summer apples faintly red,
Even beneath the crimson skin;
And yellow grapes, well ripe and thin,
Plucked from the cottage gable-end.

And certes Michael felt their friend
Hearing their voices, nor forgot
His boyhood and the pleasant spot

Beside the well-remembered stream;
And friendly did this water seem
As through its white-flowered weeds it ran
Bearing good things to beast and man.
Yea, as the parapet he passed,
And they a greeting toward him cast,
Once more he felt a boy again;
As though beneath the harvest wain
He was asleep, by that old stream,
And all these things were but a dream—
The King, the squire, the hurrying ride
Unto the lonely quagmire side;
The sudden pain, the deadly swoon,
The feverish life from noon to noon;
The tending of the kind old man,
The black and white Dominican,
The hour before the abbot's throne,
The poring o'er old books alone,
In summer morn; the King again,
The envious greetings of strange men,
This mighty horse and rich array,
This journey on an unknown way.
Surely he thought to wake from it,
And once more by the waggon sit,
Blinking upon the sunny mill.
But not for either good or ill
Shall he see one of all those days;
On through the quivering noontide haze
He rode, and now on either hand

Heavy with fruit the trees did stand;
Nor had he ridden long, ere he
The red towers of the house could see
Grey on the wind-beat southern side:
And soon the gates thrown open wide
He saw, the long-fixed drawbridge down,
The moat, with lilies overgrown,
Midst which the gold-scaled fishes lay:
Such peace was there for many a day.

And deep within the archway's shade
The warder on his cloak was laid,
Dozing, one hand upon a harp.
And nigh him-a great golden carp
Lay stiff with all his troubles done,
Drawn from the moat ere yet the sun
Was high, and nigh him was his bane,
An angling rod of Indian cane.

Now hearing Michael's horse-hooves smite
The causeway, shading from the light
His eyes, as one scarce yet awake,
He made a shift his spear to take,
And, eyeing Michael's badge the while,
Rose up, and with a lazy smile,
Said, "Ho! fair sir, abide, abide,
And show why hitherward ye ride
Unto my lady's royal home."
Said Michael, "From the king I come,
As by my badge ye well may see;
And letters have I here with me

To give my lord the Seneschal."
"Yea," said the man, "But in the hall
He feasteth now; what haste is there,
Certes full quickly cometh care;
And sure I am he will not read
Thy letters, or to aught give heed
Till he has played out all the play,
And every guest has gone away;
So thou, O damoiseau, must wait;
Tie up thine horse anigh the gate,
And sit with me, and thou shalt hear
The Kaiser lieth on his bier.
Thou laughest—hast thou never heard
Of this same valorous Red Beard,
And how he died? well, I can sing
Of many another dainty thing,
Thou wilt not a long while forget,
The budget is not empty yet.
—Peter! I think thou mockest me,
But thou art young and fair perdie,
I wish thee luck—well, thou mayest go
And feel the afternoon wind blow
Within Dame Bertha's pleasance here;
She who was held so lief and dear,
All this was built but for her sake,
Who made the hearts of men to ache;
And dying full of years and shame
Yet left an unforgotten name—
God rest her soul!"

Michael the while
Hearkened his talking with a smile,
Then said, "O friend, I think to hear
Both '*The King lieth on his bier*'
And many another song of thee,
Ere I depart; but now show me
The pleasance of the ancient queen,
For these red towers above the green
Show like the gates of paradise,
That surely somewhere through them lies."
Then said the warder, "That may be
If thou knows't what may come to thee—
When past the drawbridge thou hast gone,
Upon the left three steps of stone
Lead to a path beneath the wall
Of the great court, that folk now call
The falconer's path, nor canst thou miss
Going thereby, to find the bliss
Thou look'st for, since the path ends there,
And through a wicket gilded fair
The garden lies where thou wouldst be:
Nor will I fail to come to thee
Whene'er my Lord the Seneschal
Shall pass well fed from out the hall."
Then Michael, thanking him, passed on,
And soon the gilded wicket won,
And entered that pleasance sweet,
And wandered there with wary feet
And open mouth, as though he deemed

That in some lovely dream he dreamed,
And feared to wake to common day,
So fair was all; and e'en decay
Brought there but pensive loveliness,
Where autumn those old walls did bless
With wealth of fruit, and through the grass
Unscared the spring-born thrush did pass,
Who yet knew nought of winter-tide.
So wandering, to a fountain's side
He came, and o'er the basin hung,
Watching the fishes, as he sung
Some song remembered from of old,
Ere yet the miller won that gold.
But soon made drowsy with his ride,
And the warm hazy autumn-tide,
And many a musical sweet sound,
He cast him down upon the ground,
And watched the glittering water leap,
Still singing low, nor thought to sleep.
But scarce three minutes had gone by
Before, as if in mockery,
The starling chattered o'er his head,
And nothing he remembered,
Nor dreamed of aught that he had seen.

Meanwhile unto that garden green
Had come the Princess, and with her
A maiden that she held right dear,
Who knew the inmost of her mind.

Now those twain, as the scented wind
Played with their raiment or their hair,
Had late been running here and there,
Chasing each other merrily,
As maids do, thinking no one by;
But now, well wearied therewithal,
Had let their gathered garments fall
About their feet, and slowly went:
And through the leaves a murmur sent,
As of two happy doves that sing
The soft returning of the spring.

Now of these twain the Princess spoke
The less, but into laughter broke
Not seldom, and would redden oft,
As on her lips her fingers soft
She laid, as still the other maid,
Half grave, half smiling, follies said.

So in their walk they drew anigh
That fountain in the midst, whereby
Lay Michael sleeping, dreaming nought
Of such fair things so nigh him brought;
They, when the fountain shaft was past,
Beheld him on the ground down-cast,
And stopped at first, until the maid
Stepped lightly forward to the shade,
And when she had gazed there awhile
Came running back again, a smile
Parting her lips, and her bright eyes
Afire with many fantasies;

And ere the Lady Cecily
Could speak a word, "Hush! hush!" said she;
"Did I not say that he would come
To woo thee in thy peaceful home
Before thy father brought him here?
Come, and behold him, have no fear!
The great bell would not wake him now,
Right in his ears."
"Nay, what dost thou?"
The Princess said; "Let us go hence;
Thou know'st I give obedience
To what my father bids; but I
A maid full fain would live and die,
Since I am born to be a queen."
"Yea, yea, for such as thou hast seen,
That may be well," the other said.
"But come now, come; for by my head
This one must be from Paradise;
Come swiftly then, if thou art wise
Ere aught can snatch him back again."
She caught her hand, and not in vain
She prayed; for now some kindly thought
To Cecily's brow fair colour brought,
And quickly 'gan her heart to beat
As love drew near those eyes to greet,
Who knew him not till that sweet hour.

So over the fair, pink-edged flower,
Softly she stepped; but when she came

Anigh the sleeper, lovely shame
Cast a soft mist before her eyes
Full filled of many fantasies.
But when she saw him lying there
She smiled to see her mate so fair;
And in her heart did Love begin
To tell his tale, nor thought she sin
To gaze on him that was her own,
Not doubting he was come alone
To woo her, whom midst arms and gold
She deemed she should at first behold;
And with that thought love grew again
Until departing was a pain,
Though fear grew with that growing love;
And with her lingering footsteps strove
As from the place she turned to go,
Sighing and murmuring words full low.
But as her raiment's hem she raised,
And for her merry fellow gazed
Shamefaced and changed, she met her eyes
Turned grave and sad with ill surprise;
Who while the princess mazed did stand
Had drawn from Michael's loosened band
The king's scroll, which she held out now
To Cecily, and whispered low,
"Read, and do quickly what thou wilt,
Sad, sad! such fair life to be spilt:
Come further first."
With that they stepped

A pace or two from where he slept,
And then she read,
"Lord Seneschal,
On thee and thine may all good fall;
Greeting hereby the king sendeth,
And biddeth thee to put to death
His enemy who beareth this;
And as thou lovest life and bliss,
And all thy goods thou holdest dear,
Set thou his head upon a spear
A good half furlong from the gate,
Our coming hitherward to wait—
So perish the King's enemies!"
She read, and scarcely had her eyes
Seen clear her father's name and seal,
Ere all love's power her heart did feel,
That drew her back in spite of shame,
To him who was not e'en a name
Unto her a short hour agone.
Panting she said, "Wait thou alone
Beside him, watch him carefully
And let him sleep if none draw nigh:
If of himself he waketh, then
Hide him until I come again,
When thou hast told him of the snare—
If thou betrayest me beware!
For death shall be the least of all
The ills that on thine head shall fall—
What say I, thou art dear to me,

And doubly dear now shalt thou be,
Thou shalt have power and majesty,
And be more queen in all than I—
Few words are best, be wise, be wise!"

Withal she turned about her eyes
Once more, and swiftly as a man
Betwixt the garden trees she ran,
Until, her own bower reached at last,
She made good haste, and quickly passed
Unto her secret treasury.
There, hurrying since the time was nigh
For folk to come from meat, she took
From 'twixt the leaves of a great book
A royal scroll, signed, sealed, but blank,
Then, with a hand that never shrank
Or trembled, she the scroll did fill
With these words, writ with clerkly skill,—
"Unto the Seneschal, Sir Rafe,
Who holdeth our fair castle safe,
Greeting and health! O well-beloved,
Know that at this time we are moved
To wed our daughter, so we send
Him who bears this, our perfect friend,
To be her bridegroom; so do thou
Ask nought of him, since well we know
His race and great nobility,
And how he is most fit to be
Our son; therefore make no delay,

But wed the twain upon the day
Thou readest this: and see that all
Take oath to him, whate'er shall fall
To do his bidding as our heir;
So doing still be lief and dear
As I have held thee yet to be."

She cast the pen down hastily
At that last letter, for she heard
How even now the people stirred
Within the hall: nor dared she think
What bitter potion she must drink
If now she failed, so falsely bold
That life or death did she enfold
Within its cover, making shift
To seal it with her father's gift,
A signet of cornelian.

Then swiftly down the stairs she ran
And reached the garden; but her fears
Brought shouts and thunder to her ears,
That were but lazy words of men
Full-fed, far off; nay, even when
Her limbs caught up her flying gown
The noise seemed loud enough to drown
The twitter of the autumn birds,
And her own muttered breathless words
That to her heart seemed loud indeed.

Yet therewithal she made good speed
And reached the fountain seen of none

Where yet abode her friend alone,
Watching the sleeper, who just now
Turned in his sleep and muttered low.
Therewith fair Agnes saying nought
From out her hand the letter caught;
And while she leaned against the stone
Stole up to Michael's side alone,
And with a cool, unshrinking hand
Thrust the new scroll deep in his band,
And turned about unto her friend;
Who having come unto the end
Of all her courage, trembled there
With face upturned for fresher air,
And parted lips grown grey and pale,
And limbs that now began to fail,
And hands wherefrom all strength had gone,
Scarce fresher than the blue-veined stone
That feeble still she strove to clutch.
But when she felt her lady's touch,
Feebly she said, "Go! let me die
And end this sudden misery
That in such wise has wrapped my life,
I am too weak for such a strife,
So sick I am with shame and fear;
Would thou hadst never brought me here!"
But Agnes took her hand and said,
"Nay, queen, and must we three be dead
Because thou fearest; all is safe
If boldly thou wilt face Sir Rafe."

So saying, did she draw her hence,
Past tree and bower, and high pleached fence
Unto the garden's further end,
And left her there and back did wend,
And from the house made haste to get
A gilded maund wherein she set
A flask of ancient island wine,
Ripe fruits and wheaten manchets fine,
And many such a delicate
As goddesses in old time ate,
Ere Helen was a Trojan queen;
So passing through the garden green
She cast her eager eyes again
Upon the spot where he had lain,
But found it empty, so sped on
Till she at last the place had won
Where Cecily lay weak and white
Within that fair bower of delight.

Her straight she made to eat and drink,
And said, "See now thou dost not shrink
From this thy deed; let love slay fear
Now, when thy life shall grow so dear,
Each minute should seem loss to thee
If thou for thy felicity
Couldst stay to count them; for I say,
This day shall be thy happy day."

Therewith she smiled to see the wine
Embraced by her fingers fine;
And her sweet face grow bright again

With sudden pleasure after pain.
Again she spoke, "What is this word
That dreaming, I perchance, have heard,
But certainly remember well;
That some old soothsayer did tell
Strange things unto my lord, the King,
That on thy hand the spousal ring
No Kaiser's son, no King should set,
But one a peasant did beget—
What sayst thou?"
But the Queen flushed red;
"Such fables I have heard," she said;
"And thou—is it such scathe to me,
The bride of such a man to be?"
"Nay," said she, "God will have him King;
How shall we do a better thing
With this or that one than He can;
God's friend must be a goodly man."
But with that word she heard the sound
Of folk who through the mazes wound
Bearing the message; then she said,
"Be strong, pluck up thine hardihead,
Speak little, so shall all be well,
For now our own tale will they tell."

And even as she spoke they came
And all the green place was aflame
With golden raiment of the lords;
While Cecily, noting not their words,

Rose up to go; and for her part
By this had fate so steeled her heart,
Scarce otherwise she seemed, than when
She passed before the eyes of men
At Tourney or high festival.
But when they now had reached the hall,
And up its very steps they went,
Her head a little down she bent;
Nor raised it till the dais was gained
For fear that love some monster feigned
To be a god, and she should be
Smit by her own bolt wretchedly.
But at the rustling, crowded dais
She gathered heart her eyes to raise,
And there beheld her love, indeed,
Clad in her father's serving weed,
But proud, and flushed, and calm withal,
Fearless of aught that might befal,
Nor too astonied, for he thought,—
"From point to point my life is brought
Through wonders till it comes to this;
And trouble cometh after bliss,
And I will bear all as I may,
And ever as day passeth day,
My life will hammer from the twain,
Forging a long enduring chain."

But midst these thoughts their young eyes met,
And every word did he forget
Wherewith men name unhappiness,

As read again those words did bless
With double blessings his glad ears.
And if she trembled with her fears,
And if with doubt, and love, and shame,
The rosy colour went and came
In her sweet cheeks and smooth bright brow,
Little did folk think of it now,
But as of maiden modesty,
Shamefaced to see the bridegroom nigh.
And now when Rafe the Seneschal
Had read the message down the Hall,
And turned to her, quite calm again,
Her face had grown, and with no pain
She raised her serious eyes to his
Grown soft and pensive with his bliss,
And said,
"Prince, thou art welcome here,
Where all my father loves is dear,
And full trust do I put in thee,
For that so great nobility
He knoweth in thee; be as kind
As I would be to thee, and find
A happy life from day to day,
Till all our days are past away."
What more than found the bystanders
He found within this speech of hers,
I know not; some faint quivering
In the last words; some little thing
That checked the cold words' even flow.

But yet they set his heart aglow,
And he in turn said eagerly:—
"Surely I count it nought to die
For him who brought me unto this;
For thee, who givest me this bliss;
Yea, even dost me such a grace
To look with kind eyes in my face,
And send sweet music to my ears."
But at his words she, mazed with tears,
Seemed faint, and failing quickly, when
Above the low hum of the men
Uprose the sweet bells' sudden clang,
As men unto the chapel rang;
While just outside the singing folk
Into most heavenly carols broke.
And going softly up the hall
Boys bore aloft the verges tall
Before the bishop's gold-clad head.
Then forth his bride young Michael led,
And nought to him seemed good or bad
Except the lovely hand he had;
But she the while was murmuring low,
"If he could know, if he could know,
What love, what love, his love should be!"

But while mid mirth and minstrelsy
The ancient Castle of the Rose
Such pageant to the autumn shows
The King sits ill at ease at home,

For in these days the news is come
That he who in his line should wed,
Lies in his own town stark and dead,
Slain in a tumult in the street.
Brooding on this he deemed it meet,
Since nigh the day was come, when she
Her bridegroom's visage looked to see,
To hold the settled day with her.
And bid her at the least to wear
Dull mourning guise for gold and white.
So on another morning bright,
When the whole promised month was past,
He drew anigh the place at last
Where Michael's dead head, looking down
Upon the highway with a frown,
He doubted not at last to see.
So 'twixt the fruitful greenery
He rode, scarce touched by care the while,
Humming a roundel with a smile.
Withal, ere yet he drew anigh,
He heard their watch-horn sound from high
Nor wondered, for their wont was so,
And well his banner they might know
Amidst the stubble lands afar:
But now a distant point of war
He seemed to hear, and bade draw rein,
But listening cried, "Push on again!
They do but send forth minstrelsy
Because my daughter thinks to see

The man who lieth on his bier."
So on they passed, till sharp and clear
They heard the pipe and shrill fife sound;
And restlessly the King glanced round
To see that he had striven for,
The crushing of that sage's lore,
The last confusion of that fate.
But drawn still nigher to the gate
They turned a sharp bend of the road,
And saw the pageant that abode
The solemn coming of the King.

For first on each side, maids did sing,
Dressed in gold raiment; then there came
The minstrels in their coats of flame;
And then the many-coloured lords,
The knights' spears, and the swordmen's swords,
Backed by the glittering wood of bills.
So now, presaging many ills,
The King drew rein, yet none the less
He shrank not from his hardiness,
But thought, "Well, at the worst I die,
And yet perchance long life may lie
Before me—I will hold my peace;
The dumb man's borders still increase."
But as he strengthened thus his heart
He saw the crowd before him part,
And down the long melodious lane,
Hand locked in hand there passed the twain,

As fair as any earth has found,
Clad as king's children are, and crowned.
Behind them went the chiefest lords,
And two old knights with sheathed swords
The banners of the kingdom bore.
But now the King had pondered sore,
By when they reached him, though, indeed,
The time was short unto his need,
Betwixt his heart's first startled pang
And those old banner-bearers' clang
Anigh his saddle-bow: but he
Across their heads scowled heavily,
Not saying aught awhile: at last,
Ere any glance at them he cast,
He said, "Whence come ye? what are ye?
What play is this ye play to me?"
None answered,—Cecily, faint and white,
The rather Michael's hand clutched tight,
And seemed to speak, but not one word
The nearest to her could have heard.
Then the King spoke again,—"Sir Rafe,
Meseems this youngling came here safe
A week agone?"
"Yea, sir," he said;
"Therefore the twain I straight did wed,
E'en as thy letters bound me to."
"And thus thou diddest well to do,"
The King said. "Tell me on what day
Her old life she did put away."

"Sire, the eleventh day this is
Since that they gained their earthly bliss;"
Quoth old Sir Rafe. The King said nought,
But with his head bowed down in thought,
Stood a long while; but at the last
Upward a smiling face he cast,
And cried aloud above the folk,
"Shout for the joining of the yoke
Betwixt these twain; And thou, fair lord,
Who dost so well my every word,
Nor makest doubt of anything,
Wear thou the collar of thy King;
And a duke's banner, cut foursquare,
Henceforth shall men before thee bear
In tourney and in stricken field.

"But this mine heir shall bear my shield,
Carry my banner, wear my crown,
Ride equal with me through my town,
Sit on the same step of the throne;
In nothing will I reign alone;
Nor be ye with him miscontent,
For that with little ornament
Of gold and folk to you he came;
For he is of an ancient name
That needeth not the clink of gold—
The ancientest the world doth hold;
For in the fertile Asian land,
Where great Damascus now doth stand,
Ages agone his line was born,

Ere yet men knew the gift of corn;
And there, anigh to Paradise,
His ancestors grew stout and wise;
And certes he from Asia bore
No little of their piercing lore.
"Look then to have great happiness,
For every wrong shall he redress."

Then did the people's shouting drown
His clatter as he leapt adown;
And taking in each hand a hand
Of the two lovers, now did stand
Betwixt them on the flower-strewn way,
And to himself meanwhile 'gan say,—

"How many an hour might I have been
Right merry in the gardens green;
How many a glorious day had I
Made happy with some victory;
What noble deeds I might have done,
What bright renown my deeds have won;
What blessings would have made me glad;
What little burdens had I had;
What calmness in the hope of praise;
What joy of well-accomplished days,
If I had let these things alone;
Nor sought to sit upon my throne
Like God between the cherubim.
But now—but now, my days wax dim,

And all this fairness have I tost
Unto the winds, and all have lost
For nought, for nought! yet will I strive
My little end of life to live;
Nor will I look behind me more,
Nor forward to the doubtful shore."

With that he made the sign to turn,
And straight the autumn air did burn
With many a point of steel and gold;
And through the trees the carol rolled
Once more, until the autumn thrush
Far off 'gan twittering on his bush,
Made mindful of the long-lived spring.

So mid sweet song and tabouring,
And shouts amid the apple-grove,
And soft caressing of his love,
Began the new King Michael's reign.
Nor will the poor folk see again
A king like him on any throne,
Or such good deeds to all men done:
For then, as saith the chronicle,
It was the time, as all men tell,
When scarce a man would stop to gaze
At gold crowns hung above the ways.

HE ended; and midst those who heard were some
Who, midst his tale, half dreamed they were at home,
Round the great fire upon the winter night;
And, with the memory of the fresh delight
Wherewith they first had heard that story told,
Forgetting not they were grown weak and old,
Yet felt as if they had at least grown grey
Within the land left for so many a day.
He, with the gestures they were wont to see,
So told his tale, so strange with eld was he,
Just so he stammered, and in just such wise
He sighed, beginning fresh, as their young eyes,
Their ears, in happy days passed long ago,
Had ever noted other old men do,
When they, full filled with their quick-coming joys,
Would gaze on old folk as on carven toys.

But he being silent, silently awhile
They mused on these things, masking with a smile
The vain regrets that in their hearts arose,
The while with eager talk the young folk chose
The parts that pleased them; but their elder hosts
Falling to talk, yet noted well the ghosts
Of old desires within their wasted eyes,
Till one by one the fresh-stirred memories,
So bitter-sweet, flickered and died away;
And as old men may do, whose hopes grew grey
Before their beards, they made a little mirth
Until the great moon rose upon the earth.

APRIL.

O FAIR midspring, besung so oft and oft,
How can I praise thy loveliness enow?
Thy sun that burns not, and thy breezes soft
That o'er the blossoms of the orchard blow,
The thousand things that 'neath the young leaves grow,
The hopes and chances of the growing year,
Winter forgotten long, and summer near.

When Summer brings the lily and the rose,
She brings us fear; her very death she brings
Hid in her anxious heart, the forge of woes;
And, dull with fear, no more the mavis sings.
But thou! thou diest not, but thy fresh life clings
About the fainting autumn's sweet decay,
When in the earth the hopeful seed they lay.

Ah! life of all the year, why yet do I
Amid thy snowy blossoms' fragrant drift,
Still long for that which never draweth nigh,
Striving my pleasure from my pain to sift,
Some weight from off my fluttering mirth to lift?
—Now, when far bells are ringing, "Come again,
Come back, past years! why will ye pass in vain?"

AND now the watery April sun lit up
Upon the fair board golden ewer and cup,
And over the bright silken tapestry
The fresh young boughs were gladdening every eye,
And round the board old faces you might see
Amidst the blossoms and their greenery.
So when the flutes were silent, and the birds,
Rejoicing in their flood of unknown words,
Were heard again, a silken-fastened book
A certain elder from his raiment took,
And said, "O friends, few words are best to-day,
And no new thing I bring you; yet ye may
Be pleased to hear an ancient tale again,
That, told so long ago, doth yet remain
Fresh e'en 'mongst us, far from the Argive land:
Which tale this book, writ wholly by mine hand,
Holds gathered up as I have heard it told.
"Surely I fear me, midst the ancient gold
Base metal ye will light on here and there,
Though I have noted everything with care,
And with good will have set down nothing new:
Nor holds the land another book for you
That has the tale in full with nought beside,
So unto me let your good word betide;
Though, take it as ye may, no small delight
I had, herein this well-loved tale to write."

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS.

ARGUMENT.

ACRISIUS, king of Argos, being warned by an oracle that the son of his daughter Danaë should slay him, shut her up in a brazen tower built for that end beside the sea: there, though no man could come nigh her, she nevertheless bore a son to Jove, and she and her new-born son, set adrift on the sea, came to the island of Seriphos. Thence her son, grown to manhood, set out to win the Gorgon's Head, and accomplished that end by the help of Minerva; and afterwards rescued Andromeda, daughter of Cepheus, from a terrible doom, and wedded her. Coming back to Seriphos he took his mother thence, and made for Argos, but by stress of weather came to Thessaly, and there, at Larissa, accomplished the prophecy, by unwittingly slaying Acrisius. In the end he founded the city of Mycenæ, and died there.

NOW of the King Acrisius shall ye hear,
Who, thinking he could free his life from fear,
Did that which brought but death on him at last.
In Argos did he reign in days long past,
And had one daughter, fair as man could see,
Who in old tales is callèd Danaë;
But as she grew up fairer day by day,
A wandering oracle to him did say,
That whatso else might happen, soon or late

He should be taken in the toils of fate,
And by the fruit of his own daughter's womb
Be slain at last, and set within his tomb;
And therefore heavy sorrow on him fell,
That she he thought to love so passing well
Must henceforth be his deadliest dread and woe.
Long time he pondered what was best to do;
And whiles he thought that he would send her forth
To wed some king far in the snowy north,
And whiles that by great gifts of goods and gold
Some lying prophet might be bought and sold
To swear his daughter he must sacrifice,
If he would yet find favour in the eyes
Of the dread gods who govern everything;
And sometimes seemed it better to the King,
That he might 'scape the shedding of her blood
By leaving her in some far lonely wood,
Wherein the Dryads might the maiden find,
Or beasts might slay her, following but their kind.
So passed his anxious days, until at last,
When many a plot through his vexed brain had passed,
He lacked the heart his flesh and blood to slay,
Yet neither would he she should go away
From out his sight, or be at large at all;
Therefore his wisest craftsmen did he call,
And bade them make for him a tower foursquare,
Such as no man had yet seen anywhere,
For therein neither stone nor wood should be,
But all be wrought of brass most cunningly.

Now thither oft would maiden Danae stray,
And watch its strange walls growing day by day,
Because, poor soul! she knew not anything
Of these forebodings of the fearful King,
Nor how he meted out for her this doom,
Therein to dwell as in a living tomb.
But on a day, she, coming there alone,
Found it all finished and the workmen gone,
And no one nigh, so through the open door
She entered, and went up from floor to floor,
And through its chambers wandered without dread;
And, entering one, she found therein a bed,
Dight daintily, as though to serve a queen;
And all the walls adorned with hangings green,
Tables and benches in good order set,
And all things new, by no one used as yet.

With that she murmured, "When again I see
My father, will I bid him tell to me
Who shall live here and die here, for, no doubt,
Whoever enters here shall ne'er go out:
Therefore the walls are made so high and great,
Therefore the bolts are measureless of weight,
The windows small, barred, turned towards the sea,
That none from land may tell who here may be.
No doubt some man the King my father fears
Above all other, here shall pass his years.
Alas, poor soul! scarce shall he see the sun,
Or care to know when the hot day is done,
Or ever see sweet flowers again, or grass,

Or take much note of how the seasons pass.
Truly we folk who dwell in rest and ease
But lightly think of such abodes as these;
And I, who live wrapped round about with bliss,
Shall go from hence and soon forget all this:
For in my garden many a sweet flower blooms,
Wide open are the doors of all my rooms,
And lightly folk come in and lightly go;
And I have known as yet but childish woe."

Therewith she turned about to leave the place,
But as unto the door she set her face
A bitter wailing from outside she heard,
And somewhat therewithal she waxed afeard,
And stopped awhile; yet listening, she but thought,
"This is the man who to his doom is brought
By weeping friends, who come to see the last
Of that dear face they know shall soon be past
From them for ever." Then she 'gan to go
Adown the brazen stairs with footsteps slow.

But quick the shrieks and wailing drew anear,
Till in her ears it sounded sharp and clear,
And then she said, "Alas! and must I see
These weeping faces drawn with agony?
Would I had not come here to-day!" Withal
She started, as upon her ear did fall
The sound of shutting of the outer door,
And people coming up from floor to floor;
And paler then she grew, but moved to meet
The woful sounds and slow-ascending feet,

Shrinking with pity for that wretched one
Whose life of joy upon that day was done.
Thus down the stairs with saddened heart she passed,
And to a lower chamber came at last;
But as she went beneath the archway wide
The door was opened from the other side,
And in poured many maidens, whom she knew
For her own fair companions, leal and true;
And after them two soldiers armed there came,
With knitted brows and eyes downcast for shame.
But when those damsels saw her standing there,
Anew they wept, and tore their unbound hair;
But midst their wailing, still no word they said,
Until she spoke oppressed with sickening dread:
"O tell me what has happened to me then!
For is my father slain of outland men?
Or have the gods sent death upon the land?
Or is it mine own death that they command?
Alas, alas! but slay me quick, I pray,
Nor let me linger on from day to day,
Maddened with fear like this, that sickens me,
And makes me seem the half-dead thing ye see."
Then, like a man constrained, a soldier said
These cruel words unto the wretched maid:
"Lady, lose hope and fear now once for all;
Here must thou dwell betwixt brass wall and wall
Until the gods send gentle death to thee;
And these as erst thine handmaidens shall be:
And if thou askest why the thing is so,

Thus the King wills it, for a while ago
An oracle foretold that thou shouldst live
To have a son, who bitter death should give
Unto thy father; so, to save this shame
From falling on the glorious Argive name,
He deemed it well that thou shouldst live indeed,
But yet apart from man thy life shouldst lead.
So in this place thy days must pass away,
And we who are thy guards, from day to day
Will bring thee everything that thou mayst need.
But pardon us, constrained to do this deed
By the King's will, and oaths that we have sworn
Ere to this life of sorrow thou wert born."

Therewith they turned and went, and soon the sound
Of shutting doors smote like a deadly wound
Into her heart; and yet no word she spoke,
But fell as one beneath a deadly stroke.

Then they who there her fellows were to be
Bore up her body, groaning heavily,
Unto the upper chamber where that day
She came before, and on the bed did lay
The wretched maid, and then they sat around,
With heavy heads and hair that swept the ground,
To weep the passing of those happy days
When many an one their happy lot would praise.
But now and then, when bitterly would sting
The loss of some nigh-reached desired thing,
To a loud wail their weeping would arise.

Then in a while did Danae ope her eyes,
And to her aching forehead raised her hand;
But when she saw that wan, dishevelled band,
She soon remembered this was no ill dream,
But that all things were e'en as they did seem,
Then she arose, but soon upon the bed
Sank down again, and hid her troubled head,
And moaned and moaned, and when a damsel came
And touched her hand, and called her by her name,
She knew her not, but turned her head away:
Nor did she know when dark night followed day.

So passed by many a day in mourning sore,
And weariness oppressed her evermore
In that unhappy prison-house of brass;
And yet a little the first sting did pass
That smote her, and she ate and drank and slept,
And fair and bright her body Venus kept,
Yea, such a grace the sea-born goddess fair
Did to her, that the ripples of her hair
Grew brighter, and the colour in her face
And lovely lips waned not in that sad place;
And rounder grew her limbs from day to day;
Yea, as upon the golden bed she lay,
You would have thought the Queen herself had come
To meet some love far from her golden home.

And once it happed at the first hour of day
In golden morn upon her bed she lay,
Newly awakened to her daily woe,

And heard the rough sea beat the rocks below,
The wheeling sea-gull screaming on the wing,
Sea-swallows swift, and many a happy thing,
Till bitterly the tears ran down her cheek,
And stretching forth her arms and fingers weak,
'Twixt moans these piteous helpless words she said:—
"O Queen Diana, make me now thy maid,
And take me from this place and set me down
By the boar-haunted hills, that oak-woods crown,
Amid thy crowd of trim-girt maidens fair.

"And shall I not be safe from men-folk there,
Thou cruel King, when she is guarding me,
The mighty maid from whom the shepherds flee,
When in the gathering dusk 'twixt day and night,
The dead leaves tell them of her footsteps light,
Because they mind how dear Actæon bought
The lovely sight for which he never sought,
Diana naked in the water wan.

"Yea, what fear should I have of any man
When through the woods I, wandering merrily,
With girt-up gown, sharp sword upon the thigh,
Full quiver on the back, stout bow in hand,
Should tread with firm feet many a grassy land,
And grow strong-limbed in following up the deer,
And meet the lions' eyes with little fear.

"Alas! no doubt she hears not; many a maid
She has already, of no beast afraid,
Crisp-haired, with arms made meet for archery,
Whose limbs unclad no man shall ever see;

Though the birds see them, and the seeding grass
Harsh and unloving over them may pass,
When carelessly through rough and smooth they run,
And bough and briar catches many a one.

"Alas! why on these free maids is my thought,
When to such misery my life is brought?
I, who so long a happy maid have been,
The daughter of a great King and a Queen;
And why these fresh things do I think upon,
Who now shall see but little of the sun?

"Here every day shall have the same sad tale,
My weary damsels with their faces pale,
The dashing of the sea on this bleak rock,
Pipe of the wind through cranny and through lock,
The sea-bird's cry, like mine grown hoarse and shrill,
The far off sound of horn upon the hill,
The merry pipe about the shepherd's home,
And all the things whereto I ne'er may come.

"O ye who rule below, I pray this boon,
I may not live here long, but perish soon,
Forgotten, but at peace, since I feel nought;
For even now it comes across my thought
That here my wretched body dwells alone,
And that my soul with all my hope is gone.

"Father, thy blood upon thine own head be
If any solace Venus send to me
Within this wretched place which thou hast made,
Of thine own flesh and blood too much afraid."

Truly Diana heard not, for that tide
Upon the green grass by a river side,
Wherein she had just bathed her body sweet,
She stooped to tie the sandals to her feet,
Her linen gown upon the herbage lay,
And round her was there standing many a may
Making her ready for the morning chase.
But so it happed that Venus by the place
Was passing, just arisen from the sea,
And heard the maid complaining bitterly,
So to the window-bars she drew anigh,
And thence unseen, she saw the maiden lie,
As on the grass herself she might have lain
When in the thicket lay Adonis slain;
For power and joy she smiled thereat, and thought
"She shall not suffer all this pain for nought."
And slowly for Olympus sailed away,
And thither came at hottest of the day.
Then through the heavenly courts she went, and when
She found the father both of gods and mèn,
She smiled upon him, and said, "Knowest thou
What deeds are wrought by men in Argos now?
Wherein a brazen tower well builded is,
That hides a maid away from all my bliss;
Since thereby thinks Acrisius to forego,
This doom that has been fated long ago,
That by his daughter's son he shall be slain;
Wherefore he puts the damsel to this pain
To see no man, and thinks to 'scape his doom

If she but live and die with barren womb;
And great dishonour is it unto me
That such a maiden lives so wretchedly;
And great dishonour is it to us all
That ill upon a guiltless head should fall
To save a King from what we have decreed.
Now, therefore, tell me, shall his impious deed
Save him alive, while she that might have borne
Great kings and glorious heroes, lives forlorn
Of love's delight, in solitude and woe?"

Then said the Thunderer, "Daughter, nowise so
Shall this be in the end; heed what shall fall,
And let none think that any brazen wall
Can let the Gods from doing what shall be."

Now therewithal went Venus to the sea
Glad of her father's words, and, as she went,
Unseen the gladness of the spring she sent
Across the happy lands o'er which she moved,
Until all men felt joyous and beloved.
But while to Paphos carelessly she fared,
All day upon the tower the hot sun glared,
And Danaë within that narrow space
Went to and fro, and sometimes hid her face
Between her hands, moaning in her despair,
Or sometimes tore the fillets from her hair,
And sometimes would begin a piteous tale
Unto her maids, and in the midst would fail

For sobs and tears; but mostly would she sit
Over against the window, watching it,
And feel the light wind blowing from the sea
Against her face, with hands laid listlessly
Together in her lap; so passed the day,
And to their sleep her damsels went away,
And through the dead of night she slept awhile,
But when the dawn came, woke up with a smile,
As though she had forgotten all her pain,
But soon the heavy burden felt again,
And on her bed lay tossing wretchedly,
Until the sun had nigh looked o'er the sea.

In that fresh morn was no one stirring yet,
And many a man his troubles did forget
Buried in sleep, but nothing she forgat,
She raised herself and up in bed she sat,
And towards the window turned round wearily
To watch the changing colours of the sky;
And many a time she sighed, and seemed as though
She would have told the story of her woe
To whatsoever god near by might be
Betwixt the grey sky and the cold grey sea,
But to her lips no sound at all would rise,
Except those oft repeated heavy sighs.

And yet, indeed, within a little while
Her face grew calm, the shadow of a smile
Stole o'er her parted lips and sweet grey eyes,
And slowly from the bed did she arise,
And towards the window drew, and yet did seem,

Although her eyes were open, still to dream.
There on the sill she laid her slender hand,
And looking seaward, pensive did she stand,
And seemed as though she waited for the sun
To bring her news her misery was done;
At last he came and over the green sea
His golden road shone out right gloriously,
And into Danae's face his glory came
And lit her softly waving hair like flame.
But in his light she held out both her hands,
As though he brought her from some far-off lands
Healing for all her great distress and woe.

But yellower now the sunbeams seemed to grow
Not whiter as their wont is, and she heard
A tinkling sound that made her, half afeard,
Draw back a little from the fresh green sea,
Then to a clang the noise rose suddenly,
And gently was she smitten on the breast,
And some bright thing within her palm did rest,
And trickled down her shoulder and her side,
And on her limbs a little did abide,
Or lay upon her feet a little while.

Then in her face increased the doubtful smile,
While o'er her eyes a drowsy film there came,
And in her cheeks a flush as if of shame,
And, looking round about, could she behold
The chamber scattered o'er with shining gold,
That grew, till ankle-deep she stood in it.

Then through her limbs a tremor did there flit

As through white water runs the summer wind,
And many a wild hope came into her mind,
But her knees bent and soft she sank down there,
And on the gold was spread her golden hair,
And like an ivory image still she lay,
Until the night again had hidden day.

But when again she lifted up her head,
She found herself laid soft within her bed,
While midmost of the room the taper shone,
And all her damsels from the place were gone,
And by her head a gold-robed man there stood,
At sight of whom the damsel's shamefast blood
Made all her face red to the golden hair,
And quick she covered up her bosom fair.

Then in a great voice said he, "Danaë,
Sweet child, be glad, and have no fear of me,
And have no shame, nor hide from thy new love
The breast that on this day has pillowed Jove.
Come now, come from that balmy nest of thine,
And stand with me beneath the taper's shine
That I may see thy beauty once again;
Then never shalt thou be in any pain,
But if thou liftest up thy face to Jove
I shall be kind to my sweet simple love;
I shall bethink me of thy body sweet,
From golden head to rosy little feet."
Then, trembling sore, from out the bed she came

And hid away her face for dread and shame,
But soon she trembled more for very love,
To feel the loving hands of mighty Jove
Draw down her hands, and kisses on the head
And tender bosom, as again he said,
"Now must I go; and sweet love, Danae,
Fear nothing more that man can do to thee,
For soon shall come an ending to thy woe,
And thou shalt have a son whose name shall grow
Still greater, till the mountains melt away
And men no more can tell the night from day."

Then forth he sprang and o'er the sea did fly
And loud it thundered from a cloudless sky.

SO when her damsels came to her next day,
And thought to see her laid in her old way
Upon the bed, and looking out to sea
Moaning full oft, and sighing heavily,
They found her singing o'er a web of silk
Where through the even warp as white as milk
Quick flew the shuttle from her arm of snow,
And somewhat from her girded gown did show
On the black treadles both her rosy feet,
Moving a little as the tall green wheat

Moves in the June when Zephyr blows on it,
So, like a goddess weaving did she sit.
But when she saw her maidens wondering stand
She ceased her song and stayed her busy hand,
And said, "Girls, if ye see me glad to-day
Be nought amazed, for all things pass away;
The good days die, but also die the bad.
"See now, in sleep last night a dream I had
That in his claws an eagle lifted me
And bore me to a land across the sea:
Wherefore I think that here I shall not die
But live to feel dew falling from the sky,
And set my feet deep in the meadow grass
And underneath the scented pine-trees pass,
Or in the garden feel the western breeze,
The herald of the rain, sweep through the trees,
Or in the hottest of the summer day,
Betwixt green banks within the mill-stream play.
"For either shall my father soon relent,
Or for my sake some marvel shall be sent,
And either way these doors shall open wide;
And then doubt not to see me soon a bride
With some king's amorous son before my feet.
"Ah! verily my life shall then be sweet;
Before these days I knew not life or death,
With little hope or fear I drew my breath,
But now when all this sorrow is o'erpast,
Then shall I feel how sweet life is at last,
And know how dear peace is from all these fears.

"So no more will I waste my life in tears,
But pass the time as swiftly as may be,
Until ye step out on the turf with me."

Then glad they were, when such-like words they heard,
And yet some doubted and were sore afeard
That she had grown light-headed with her woe,
Dreading the time might come when she would throw
Her body on the ground and perish there,
Slain by her own hand mighty with despair.
Nathless the days more merrily went by
And from that prison men heard minstrelsy,
When nought but mourning, fisher-folk afeard
Who passed that way, in other times had heard.

Yet truly Danae said that all things pass
And are forgotten; in that house of brass
Forgotten was the stunning bitter pain
Wherewith she entered it, and yet again
In no long time, hope was forgotten too
When wringing torments moaning from her drew,
And to and fro the pale scared damsels went,
And those her guards unto Acrisius sent.
But ere the messenger returned again
She had been eased of half her bitterest pain,
And on her breast a fair man-child was laid;
Then round the messenger her maids afraid
Drew weeping; but he charged them earnestly,

Ever to watch her in that chamber high,
Lest any man should steal the babe away,
And so to bide until there came a day
When on her feet she might arise and go,
Whereof by messengers the King must know;
So, threatening torments unendurable,
If any harm through treachery befell,
He left them, and no more to them he told,
But in his face the sooth they might behold.

Now, therefore when some wretched days were past,
And trembling by the bed she stood at last,
She heard the opening of the outer door,
And footsteps came again from floor to floor,
And soon with all-armed men her chamber shone,
Who with few words now led her forth alone
Adown the stairs from out the brazen place;
And on her hot hands, and her tear-stained face
Half-fainting, the pine-scented air she felt,
And all about the salt sea savour smelt,
And in her ears the dashing of the sea
Rang ever; thus the God had set her free.

But by the shore further they led her still
To where the sea beat on a barren hill,
And a long stage of timber met the sea,
At end whereof was tossing fearfully
A little boat that had no oars or sail,
Or aught that could the mariner avail.
Thither with her their steps the soldiers bent,
And as along the narrow way they went

The salt waves leapt aloft to kiss her feet
And in the wind streamed out her tresses sweet;
But little heed she took of feet or head
For nought she doubted she to death was led,
But ever did she hold against her breast
The little babe, and spoke not for the rest,
No, not when in the boat they bade her go,
And 'twixt its bulwarks thin she lay alow,
Nor when adrift they set her presently
And all about was but the angry sea.

No word she said until the sun was down,
And she beheld the moon that on no town,
On no fair homestead, no green pasture shone,
But lit up the unwearied sea alone;
No word she said till she was far from shore
And on her breast the babe was wailing sore,
And then she lifted up her face to Jove,
And said, "O thou who once didst call me love,
Hast thou forgotten those fair words of thine,
When underneath the taper's glimmering shine
Thou bad'st me stand that thou mightst look on me
And love thou call'dst me, and sweet Danaë?
Now of thy promised help am I most fain
For on what day can I have greater pain
Than this wherein to-night my body is,
And brought thereto by what, but thy sweet kiss?
But neither did she pray the God in vain;
For straight he set himself to end her pain,

And while he cast on her a gentle sleep,
The winds within their houses did he keep
Except the west which soft on her did blow,
That swiftly through the sea the boat might go.

Far out to sea a certain isle doth lie
Men call Seriphos, craggy, steep, and high:
It rises up on every side but one,
And mariners its ill-famed headlands shun;
But toward the south the meads slope soft adown,
Until they meet the yellow sands and brown,
That slope themselves so gently to the sea,
The nymphs are hidden only to the knee
When half a mile of rippling water is
Between the waves that their white limbs do kiss
And the last wave that washes shells ashore.
To this fair place the west wind onward bore
The skiff that carried Danae and her son,
And on the morn, when scarce the dusk was done,
Upon the sands the shallop ran aground;
And still they slept, and for awhile around
Their wretched bed the waves sang lullaby,
But sank at last and left the long strand dry.
Then uprose Danaë, and nothing knew
What land it was: about her sea-fowl flew;
Behind her back the yet retreating sea
Beat on the yellow sands unceasingly;
Landward she saw the low green meadows lie,
Dotted with homesteads, rich with elm-trees high;

And at her feet the little boat there lay
That happily had brought her on the way.
But as it happed, the brother of the King
Had ridden forth to hear the sea-fowl sing,
With hawk on fist, right early on that morn,
Hard by the place whereunto she was borne.
He, seeing far away a white thing stand,
Deemed her at first some maiden of the sand,
Such as to fishers sings a honied strain,
And leaves them longing for her love in vain.
So, wishful to behold the sea-folk's bride,
He set the spurs into his horse's side.
But drawing nigher, he but saw her there,
Not moving much, her unbound yellow hair
Heavy with dew and washing of the sea;
And her wet raiment clinging amorously
About her body, in the wind's despite;
And in her arms her woe and her delight,
Spreading abroad the small hands helplessly
That on some day should still the battle's cry.
And furthermore he saw where by her lay
The boat that brought her o'er the watery way:
Then, though he knew not whence she might have come,
He doubted not the firm land was her home.

But when he came anigh, beholding him,
She fell a trembling in her every limb,
And kneeling to him held the young babe out,

And said: "O Sir, if, as I have no doubt,
In this strange land thou art a king and lord,
Speak unto me some comfortable word.

"Born of a king who rules a lovely land,
I in my house that by the sea doth stand,
With all my girls, made merry on a day:
Now some of them upon the sands did play,
Dancing unto their fellows' minstrelsy;
And some it pleased upon sweet flowers to lie,
Ripe fruits around, and thence to look on them;
And some were fain to lift their kirtles' hem,
And through the shallows chase the fishes fleet;
But in this shallop would I have my seat
Alone, and holding this my little son,
And knowing not that my good days were done.

"Now how it chanced, in sooth I cannot say,
But yet I think that one there was that day,
Who for some hidden cause did hate me sore,
Who cut the cord that bound me to the shore,
And soon amidst my helpless shrieks the boat,
Oarless and sailless, out to sea did float.

"But now that many a danger has been passed,
The gods have sent me to your land at last,
Alive, indeed, but such-like as you see,
Cold and drenched through with washing of the sea,
Half-clad, and kneeling on an unknown land,
And for a morsel holding out my hand."

Then said he, "Lady, fear not any more,

For you are come unto no savage shore,
But here shall be a queen as erst at home:
And if thou askest whereto thou art come,
This is the isle Seriphos; and for me,
My name is Dictys, and right royally
My brother lives, the king of all the isle.
Him shalt thou see within a little while,
And doubtless he will give thee everything
That 'longs unto the daughter of a king.

"Meanwhile I bid thee in mine house to rest,
And there thy wearied body shall be dressed
In seemly raiment by my women slaves,
And thou shalt wash thee from the bitter waves,
And eat and drink, and sleep full easily;
And on the morrow shalt thou come with me
And take King Polydectes by the hand,
Who in good peace rules o'er this quiet land."

Then on his horse he set the Queen, while he
Walked by the side thereof right soberly,
And half asleep, as slow they went along,
She laid her hand upon the war-horse strong,
While Dictys by her side Jove's offspring bore,
And thus they left the sea-beat yellow shore.
And as one dreaming to the house she came,
Where in the sun the brazen doors did flame;
And there she ate and drank as in a dream;
Dreamlike to her the scented bath did seem
After the icy sprinkling of the waves,
And like a dream the fair, slim women-slaves,

Who laid her in the fair bed, where she slept
Dreamless, until the horned white moon had stept
Over the fresh pine-scented hills again.

But when the sun next day drave forth his wain,
The damsel, clad in queen-like gold array,
With Dictys to the palace took her way;
And there by minstrels duly were they met,
Who brought them to the great hall, where was set
The King upon a royal throne of gold:
Black-bearded was he, thirty summers old,
Comely and strong, and seemed a king indeed;
Who, when he saw the minstrels thither lead
Fair Danaë, rose up to her, and said:
"Oh, welcome, lady! be no more afraid
That thou shalt lose thy state and dignity;
Yea, since a gem the gods have sent to me,
With plates of silver will I overlay
The casket that has brought it on the way,
And set it in King Neptune's house to stand
Until the sea shall wash away the land.

"And for thyself a fair house shalt thou have
With all things needful, and right many a slave,
Both men and women; fair shall all things be
That thou mayst dwell here in felicity,
And that no care may wrinkle thy smooth brow.

"And for the child, when he is old enow
The priests of Pallas shall of him have care,
And thou shalt dwell hard by her temple fair;
But on this good day in mine hall abide,

And do me grace in sitting by my side."
Then mounted she the dais and sat, and then
Was she beheld of all the island-men
Who praised her much, and praised the sturdy child,
Who at their shouting made as if he smiled.
So passed the feast, and at the end of day
Towards her own house did Danae go away,
That stood amid Minerva's olive-trees
Hidden away from moaning of the seas.

And there began fair Danae's life again,
And quite forgotten was her ancient pain,
And peacefully did day succeed to day,
While fairer grew the well-loved child alway,
And strong and wise beyond his scanty years,
And in the island all his little peers
Held him for lord whatso might be their worth,
And Perseus is his name from this time forth.

LO, eighteen summers now have come and gone
Since on the beach fair Danae stood alone
Holding her little son, nor yet was she
Less fair than when the hoarse unwilling sea
Moaned loud that Neptune drew him from her feet,
And the wind sighed upon her bosom sweet.

For, in that long past half-forgotten time,
While yet the world was young, and the sweet clime,
Golden and mild, no bitter storm-clouds bred,
Light lay the years upon the untroubled head,
And longer men lived then by many a year
Than in these days, when every week is dear.

Now on a day was held a royal feast
Whereon there should be slain full many a beast
Unto Minerva; thereto the King came,
And in his heart love lit a greedy flame
At sight of Danae's arms stretched out in prayer
Unto the goddess, and her yellow hair,
Wreathed round with olive wreaths, that hung adown
Over the soft folds of her linen gown;
And when at last he took her by the hand
Speechless by her did Polydectes stand,
So much with fond desire bewildered
At sight of all that wondrous white and red,
That peaceful face wherein all past distress
Had melted into perfect loveliness.
So when that night he lay upon his bed,
Full many a thought he turned within his head
Of how he best might unto that attain,
Whose lack now filled him with such burning pain.
And at the first it seemed a little thing
For him who was a rich man and a king,
Either by gifts to win her, or to send
And fetch her thither, and perforce to end

Her widowhood; but then there came the thought,
"By force or gifts hither she might be brought,
And here might I get that for which I long,
Yet has she here a son both brave and strong,
Nor will he think it much to end my days
If he may get thereby the people's praise,
E'en if therewith he shortly needs must die;
Ah, verily, a purblind fool was I,
That when I first beheld that matchless face
I had no eyes to see her heavenly grace;
Then with few words might I have held her here
And kept her for mine own with little fear;
But now I have no will the lad to slay,
For he would be revenged some evil day,
Who now Jove's offspring do I think to be,
So dowered he is with might and majesty.

"Yet could I find perchance some fair pretence
Whereby with honour I might send him hence,
Nor have the youngling's blood upon my head,
Then might he be well nigh as good as dead."

So pondering on his bed long time he lay,
Until the night began to mix with day,
And then he smiled and so to sleep turned round,
As though at last some sure way he had found.

And now it chanced to come round to the day,
When all the lords clad in their rich array
Unto the King should come for royal feast;
And there the way was, that both most and least

Should thither bear some present for the King,
As horse or sword, gold chain, fair cup, or ring.
Unto which feast was Perseus bidden now
Who giftless came, bare as the winter bough,
For little was his wealth in that strange land.
So there ashamed it was his lot to stand,
Before the guests were called to meat, and when
He sat amidst those royally-clad men
Little he spake for shame of his estate,
Not knowing yet his god-like birth and great.
So passed the feast, and when the full time came
To show the gifts, he waxed all red for shame:
For through the hall white horses were brought up,
And well-clad slaves, and many a dainty cup,
And many a gem well set in brooch or ring,
And laid before the daïs of the King.
But all alone of great folk of the land
With eyes cast down for rage did Perseus stand,
Yet for his manhood thence he would not go.
Now some that secretly were bidden so,
Beholding him began to gibe and jeer,
Yet not too loud, held back perchance by fear,
And thus a murmur spread about the hall
As, each to each, men cast about the ball,
Which the King heard, or seemed to hear at last,
And round the noisy hall a look he cast,
And then beholding Perseus with a smile
He said, "Good friends, fair lords, be still awhile,
And say no ill about this giftless guest,

For truly not the worst, if scarce the best,
I hold him, and forsooth so rich I live
Within this land, that I myself may give
Somewhat to him, nor yet take from him aught,
And when I bade him here this was my thought."
Then stretching out his arm did he take up
From off the board, a jewelled golden cup
And said, "O Perseus, come and sit by me,
And from my hand take this, that thou dost see
And be my friend." Then Perseus drew anear,
And took the cup and said, "This shall be dear
Unto mine eyes while on the earth I live;
And yet a gift I in my turn may give,
When to this land comes bitter war, or when
Some enemy thou hast among great men;
Yea, sire, among these knights and lords I swear
To do whatso thou bidd'st me without fear."

Then the King smiled and said, "Yea, verily,
Then wilt thou give a great gift unto me,
Nor yet, forsooth, too early by a day;
To-morrow may'st thou be upon thy way.
"Far in the western sea a land there is
Desert and vast, and emptied of all bliss,
Where dwell the Gorgons wretchedly enow;
Two of them die not, one above her brow
And wretched head bears serpents, for the shame
That on an ill day fell upon her name,
When in Minerva's shrine great sin was wrought,

For thither by the Sea-god she was brought,
And in the maiden's house in love they mixed;
Who wrathful, in her once fair tresses fixed
That snaky brood, and shut her evermore
Within a land west of the Lybian shore.
"Now if a king could gain this snaky head
Full well for war were he apparelled,
Because no man may look thereon and live.
A great gift, therefore, Perseus, wouldst thou give
If thou shouldst bring this wonder unto me;
And for the place, far in the western sea
It lies, I say, but nothing more I know,
Therefore I bid thee, to some wise man go
Who has been used this many a day to pore
O'er ancient books of long-forgotten lore."

Thus spoke the King, knowing the while full well
None but a god of that far land could tell.
But Perseus answered, "O my Lord, the King,
Thou settest me to win a dreadful thing,
Yet for thy bounty this gift will I give
Unto thine hands, if I should chance to live."
With that he turned, and silent, full of thought,
From out the hall he passed not noting aught,
And toward his home he went but soberly,
And thence went forth an ancient man to see
He hoped might tell him that he wished to know
And to what land it were the best to go.
But when he told the elder all the tale,

He shook his head, and said, "Nought will avail
My lore for this, nor dwells the man on earth
Whose wisdom for this thing will be of worth,
Yea, to this dreadful land no man shall win
Unless some god himself shall help therein;
Therefore, my son, I rede thee stay at home,
For thou shalt have full many a chance to roam
Seeking for something that all men love well,
Not for an unknown isle where monsters dwell."

Then forth again went Perseus soberly
And walked along the border of the sea,
Upon the yellow sands where first he came
That time that he was deemed his mother's shame.
And now was it the first hour of the night,
Therefore within the west a yellow light
Yet shone, though risen was the horned moon,
Whose lonely cold grey beams would quench it soon,
Though now her light was shining doubtfully
On the wet sands, for low down was the sea
But rising, and the salt-sea wind blew strong
And drave the hurrying breakers swift along.
So there walked Perseus thinking many a thing
About those last words of the wily king,
And as he went at last he came upon
An ancient woman, who said, "Fair, my son,
What dost thou wandering here in the cold night?
When in the King's hall glance from shade to light
The golden sandals of the dancing girls,

And in the gold cups set with gems and pearls
The wine shines fair that glads the heart of man;
What dost thou wandering 'neath the moonlight wan?"

"This have I done," said he, "as one should swear
To make the vine bear bunches twice a year,
For I have sworn the Gorgon's head to bring
A worthy gift unto our island King,
When neither I, nor any man can tell
In what far land apart from men they dwell.
Some god alone can help me in my need;
And yet unless somehow I do the deed
An exile I must be from this fair land,
Nor with my peers shall I have heart to stand."
Grim in the moonlight smiled the aged crone,
And said, "If living there thou com'st, alone
Of all men yet, what thinkest thou to do?
Then verily thy journey shalt thou rue,
For whoso looks upon that face meets death,
That in his sick heart freezes up his breath
Until he has the semblance of a stone."
But Perseus answered straightly to the crone,
"O Mother, if the gods but give me grace
To come anigh that fair and dreadful face,
Well may they give me grace enough also
Their enemy and mine to lay alow."
Now as he spake, the white moon risen high
Burst from a cloud, and shone out gloriously,
And down the sands her path of silver shone,

And lighted full upon that ancient crone;
And there a marvel Perseus saw indeed,
Because in face, in figure, and in weed,
She wholly changed before his wondering eyes.

Now tall and straight her figure did arise,
That erst seemed bent with weight of many a year,
And on her head a helmet shone out clear
For the rent clout that held the grizzled head:
With a fair breastplate was she furnished,
From whence a hauberk to her knees fell down;
And underneath, a perfumed linen gown,
O'erwrought with many-coloured Indian silk,
Fell to her sandall'd feet, as white as milk.
Grey-eyed she was, like amber shone her hair,
Aloft she held her right arm round and bare,
Whose long white fingers closed upon a spear.

Then trembled Perseus with unwonted fear
When he beheld before him Pallas stand,
And with bowed head he stood and outstretched hand:
But she smiled on him softly, and she said,
"Hold up again, O Perseus, thy fair head,
Because thou art indeed my father's son,
And in this quest that now thou goest upon
Thou shalt not fail: I swear it by my head,
And that black water all immortals dread.

"Look now before my feet, and thou shalt see
Four helpful things the high gods lend to thee,
Not willing thou shouldst journey forth in vain:

Hermes himself, the many-eyed one's bane,
Gives these two-winged shoes, to carry thee
Tireless high over every land and sea;
This cap is his whose chariot caught away
The maid of Enna from her gentle play;
And if thou art hard-pressed of any one
Set this on thee, and so be seen of none:
The halting god was craftsman of this blade,
No better shone, when, making heaven afraid,
The giants round our golden houses cried,
For neither brass nor steel its edge can bide,
Or flinty rocks or gleaming adamant:
With these, indeed, but one thing dost thou want,
And that I give thee; little need'st thou reck
Of those grey hopeless eyes, if round thy neck
Thou hang'st this shield, that, hanging once on mine,
In the grim giant's hopeless eyes did shine.
" And now be strong, and fly forth with good heart
Far northward, till thou seest the ice-walls part
The weary sea from snow-clad lands and wan,
Untrodden yet by any son of man.
There dwell the Gorgons' ancient sisters three
Men call the Graiæ, who make shift to see
With one eye, which they pass from hand to hand.
Now make thyself unseen in this white land
And snatch the eye, while crooning songs they sit,
From hand to withered hand still passing it;
And let them buy it back by telling thee
How thou shalt find within the western sea
The unknown country where their sisters dwell.

" Which thing unto thee I myself would tell,
But when with many a curse I set them there,
I in my wrath by a great oath did swear
I would not name again the country grey
Wherein they dwell, with little light of day.
" Good speed, O Perseus; make no tarrying,
But straightly set thyself to do this thing."

Now as his ears yet rung with words like these,
And on the sand he sank upon his knees
Before the goddess, there he knelt alone
As in a dream; but still the white moon shone
Upon the sword, the shield, and cap and shoes,
Which half adrad he was at first to use,
Until the goddess gave him heart at last,
And his own gear in haste aside he cast,
And armed himself in that wild, lonely place:
Then turning round, northward he set his face,
And rose aloft and o'er the lands 'gan fly,
Betwixt the green earth and the windy sky.
Young was the night when first he left the sands
Of small Seriphos, but right many lands
Before the moon was down his winged feet
Had borne him over, tireless, strong, and fleet.
Then in the starlight black beneath him lay
The German forests, where the wild swine play,
Fearless of what Diana's maids may do,
Who ever have more will to wander through
The warm and grassy woods of Thessaly,

Or in Sicilian orange-gardens lie.
But ere the hot sun on his arms 'gan shine
He had passed o'er the Danube and the Rhine,
And heard the faint sound of the northern sea;
But ever northward flew untiringly,
Till Thule lay beneath his feet at last.
Then o'er its desert icy hills he passed,
And on beneath a feeble sun he flew,
Till, rising like a wall, the cliffs he knew
That Pallas told him of: the sun was high,
But on the pale ice shone but wretchedly;
Pale blue the great mass was, and cold enow;
Grey tattered moss hung from its jagged brow,
No wind was there at all, though ever beat
The leaden tideless sea against its feet.

Then lighted Perseus on that dreary land,
And when on the white plain his feet did stand
He saw no sign of either beast or man,
Except that near by rose a palace wan,
Built of some metal that he could not name.
Thither he went, and to a great door came
That stood wide open, so without a word
He entered in, and drew his deadly sword,
Though neither sword or man could you behold
More than folk see their death ere they grow old.
So having entered, through a cloister grey
With cautious steps and slow he took his way,
At end whereof he found a mighty hall;

Where, bare of hangings, a white marble wall
And milk-white pillars held the roof aloft,
And nothing was therein of fair or soft;
And at one end, upon a daïs high,
There sat the crones that had the single eye,
Clad in blue sweeping cloak and snow-white gown;
While o'er their backs their straight white hair hung down
In long thin locks; dreadful their faces were
Carved all about with wrinkles of despair;
And as they sat they crooned a dreary song,
Complaining that their lives should last so long,
In that sad place that no one came anear,
In that wan place desert of hope and fear;
And singing, still they rocked their bodies bent,
And ever each to each the eye they sent.

Awhile stood Perseus gazing on the three
Then sheathed his sword, and toward them warily
He went, and from the last one snatched the eye,
Who, feeling it gone from her, with a cry
Sprung up and said, "O sisters, he is here
That we were warned so long ago to fear,
And verily he has the eye of me."

Then those three, thinking they no more should see
What feeble light the sun could show them there,
And that of all joys now their life was bare,
Began a wailing and lamenting sore
That they were worse than ever heretofore.

Then Perseus cried, "Unseen am I indeed,
But yet a mortal man, who havé a need
Your wisdom can make good, if so ye will;
Now neither do I wish you any ill,
Nor this your treasure will I keep from you
If ye will tell me what I needs must do
To gain, upon the earth or under it,
The dreary country where your sisters sit:
Of whom, as wise men say, the one is fair
As any goddess, but with snaky hair
And body that shall perish on some day,
While the two others ancient are, and grey
As ye be, but shall see the whole world die."

Then said they, "Rash man, give us back the eye
Or rue this day, for wretched as we are,
Beholding not fair peace or godlike war,
Or any of the deeds of men at all,
Yet are we strong, and on thy head shall fall
Our heavy curses, and but dismally
Thy life shall pass until thou com'st to die."

"Make no delay," he said, "to do this thing,
Or this your cherished sight I soon shall fling
Into the sea, or burn it up with fire."

"What else, what else, but this wilt thou desire?"
They said, "Wilt thou have long youth at our hands?
Or wilt thou be the king of lovely lands?
Or store up wealth to lead thy life in mirth?
Or wilt thou have the beauty of the earth
With all her kindness for thy very own?

Choose what thou wilt except this thing alone."
"Nay," said he, "for nought else I left my home,
For this sole knowledge hither am I come,
Not all unholpen of the gods above;
Nor yet shall words my stedfast purpose move."
Then with that last word did he hold his peace,
And they no less from wailing words did cease,
Hoping that in that silence he might think
Of their dread words and from the evils shrink
Wherewith they threatened him; but in his heart
Most godlike courage fit for such a part
The white-armed goddess of the loom had set,
Nor in that land her help did he forget.

Withal, when many an hour had now gone by,
Together did the awesome sisters cry,
"O man! O man! hear that which thou would'st know,
And with thy knowledge let the dread curse go,
We, least of all, have 'scaped, of those who dwell
Upon this wretched fire-concealing shell.
Slave of the cruel gods! go, get ye hence,
And storing deeds for fruitless penitence,
Go east, as though in Scythia was your home,
But when unto the wind-beat seas ye come
Stop short, and turn round to the south again
Until ye reach the western land of Spain;
There o'er the straits ye soon shall come to be
Betwixt the ocean and the inner sea,
Thenceforth go westward even as thou mayst

Until ye find a dark land long laid waste,
Where green cliffs rise from out an inky sea,
But no green leaf may grow on bush or tree.
No sun makes day there, no moon lighteth night,
The long years there must pass in grey twilight;
There dwell our sisters, walking dismally,
Between the dull-brown caverns and the sea.

"Toil in the hands of gods! do there thy night!
Nor fall like us, nor strive for peace and right;
But give our own unto us and be gone,
And leave us to our misery alone."

Then straight he put the eye into the hand
Of her that spoke, and turned from that white land,
Leaving them singing their grim song again.
But flying forth he came at last to Spain,
And so unto the southern end of it,
And then with restless wings due west did flit.
For many a day across the sea he flew,
That lay beneath him clear enough and blue,
Until at last rose such a thick grey mist,
That of what lay beneath him nought he wist;
But still through this he flew a night and day
Hearkening the washing of the watery way,
Unseen: but when, at ending of the night,
The mist was gone and grey sea came in sight,
He thought that he had reached another world;
This way and that the leaden seas were hurled,

Moved by no wind, but by some unseen power;
Twilight it was and still his feet dropped lower,
As through the thickening, dim hot air he passed,
Until he feared to reach the sea at last.

But even as his feet dragged in the sea,
He, praying to the goddess fervently,
Felt her good help, for soon he rose again
Three fathoms up, and flew with lessened pain;
And looking through the dimness could behold
The wretched land whereof the sisters told.
And soon could see how down the green cliffs fell
A yellow stream, that from some inland well
Arose, and through the land ran sluggishly,
Until it poured with dull plash in the sea
Like molten lead; and nigher as he came
He saw great birds, whose kind he could not name
That whirling noiselessly about did seem
To seek a prey within that leaden stream;
And drawing nigher yet, at last he saw
That many of them held, with beak or claw,
Great snakes they tore still flying through the air.
Then making for the cliff and lighting there
He saw, indeed, that tawny stream and dull
Of intertwining writhen snakes was full,
So, with a shudder, thence he turned away,
And through the untrodden land he took his way.

Now cave-pierced rocks there rose up everywhere,
And gaunt old trees, of leaves and fruit all bare;
And midst this wretchedness a mighty hall,

Whose great stones made a black and shining wall;
The doors were open, and thence came a cry
Of one in anguish wailing bitterly;
Then o'er its threshold passed the son of Jove,
Well shielded by the grey-eyed Maiden's love.
Now there he saw two women bent and old,
Like to those three that erst he did behold
Far northward, sitting well-nigh motionless,
Their eyes grown stony with their long distress,
Stared out at nought, and still no sound they made,
And on their knees their wrinkled hands were laid.
But a third woman paced about the hall,
And ever turned her head from wall to wall
And moaned aloud, and shrieked in her despair;
Because the golden tresses of her hair
Were moved by writhing snakes from side to side,
That in their writhing oftentimes would glide
On to her breast, or shuddering shoulders white;
Or, falling down, the hideous things would light
Upon her feet, and crawling thence would twine
Their slimy folds about her ankles fine.
But in a thin red garment was she clad,
And round her waist a jewelled band she had,
The gift of Neptune on the fatal day
When fate her happiness first put away.
So there awhile unseen did Perseus stand,
With softening heart, and doubtful trembling hand
Laid on his sword hilt, muttering, "Would that she
Had never turned her woeful face to me."

But therewith Pallas smote him with this thought,
"Does she desire to live, who has been brought
Into such utter woe and misery,
Wherefrom no god or man can set her free,
Since Pallas' dreadful vow shall bind her fast,
Till earth and heaven are gone, and all is past?
—And yet, would God the thing were at an end."

Then with that word, he saw her stop and rend
The raiment from her tender breast and soft,
And with a great cry lift her arms aloft;
Then on her breast her head sank, as she said,
"O ye, be merciful, and strike me dead!
How many an one cries unto you to live,
Which gift ye find no little thing to give,
O give it now to such, and unto me
That other gift from which all people flee!

"O was it not enough to take away
The flowery meadows and the light of day?
Or not enough to take away from me
The once-loved faces that I used to see;
To take away sweet sounds and melodies,
The song of birds, the rustle of the trees;
To make the prattle of the children cease,
And wrap my soul in shadowy hollow peace,
Devoid of longing? Ah, no, not for me!
For those who die your friends this rest shall be;
For me no rest from shame and sore distress,
For me no moment of forgetfulness;
For me a soul that still might love and hate,

Shut in this fearful land and desolate,
Changed by mine eyes to horror and to stone;
For me perpetual anguish all alone,
Midst many a tormenting misery,
Because I know not if I e'er shall die.

"And yet, and yet, thee will I pray unto,
Thou dweller in the varying halls of blue,
Fathoms beneath the treacherous bridge of lands.
Call now to mind that day upon the sands,
Hard by the house of Pallas white and cold,
Where hidden in some wave thou didst behold
This body, fearless of the cold grey sea,
And dowered as yet with fresh virginity.

"How many things thou promisedst me then!
Who among all the daughters of great men
Should be like me? what sweet and happy life!
What peace, if all the world should be at strife,
Thou promisedst me then! Lay all aside,
And give unto the great Earth-Shaker's bride
That which the wretch shut up in prison drear,
Deprived of all, yet ceases not to fear;
That which all men fear more than all distress,
Irrevocable dull forgetfulness."

Her constant woeful prayer was heard at last,
For now behind her unseen Perseus passed,
And silently whirled the great sword around;
And when it fell, she fell upon the ground,
And felt no more of all her bitter pain.

But from their seats rose up with curses vain
The two immortals when they saw her fall
Headless upon the floor, and loud 'gan call'
On those that came not, because far away
Their friends and kindred were upon that day.
Then to and fro about the hall they ran
To find the slayer, were he god or man,
And when unseen from out the place he drew,
Upon the unhappy corpse, with wails, they threw
Their wretched and immortal bodies old:
But when the one the other did behold,
Alive and hideous there before her eyes,
Such anguish for the past time would arise
Within their hearts, that the lone hall would ring
With dreadful shrieks of many an impious thing.

Yet of their woe but little Perseus knew,
As with a stout heart south-east still he flew.

NOW at his side a wallet Perseus bore,
With threads of yellow gold embroidered o'e
Shuddering, therein he laid the fearful head,
Lest he unwitting yet might join the dead,
Or those he loved by sight of it be slain.

But strong fate led him to the Lybian plain,
Where, at the ending of a sultry day,

A palace huge and fair beneath him lay,
Whose roofs with silver plates were covered o'er;
Then lighting down by its enormous door,
He heard unmeasured sounds of revelry,
And thought, 'A fair place this will be for me,
Who lack both food and drink, and rest this night.'
So turning to the ruddy flood of light,
Up the huge steps he toiled unto the hall;
But even as his eager foot did fall
Upon the threshold, such a mocking shout
Rang in his ears as Etna sendeth out
When, at the day's end, round the stithy cold
The Cyclops some unmeasured banquet hold.
And monstrous men could he see sitting there,
Burnt by the sun, with length of straight back hair,
And taller far than men are wont to be;
And at a gold-strewn daïs could he see
A mighty King, a fearful man to face,
Brown-skinned and black-haired, of the giants' race,
Who seeing him, with thundering voice 'gan call,
"O Stranger, come forthwith into the hall,
Atlas would see thee!" Forth stood Perseus then,
And going 'twixt the rows of uncouth men
Seemed but a pigmy; but his heart was great,
And vain is might against the stroke of fate.

Then the King cried; "Who art thou, little one?
Surely in thy land weak must be the sun
If there are bred such tender folk as thou:
May the gods grant such men are few enow!

Art thou a king's son?" Loud he laughed withal,
And shouts of laughter rang throughout the hall,
Like clattering thunder on a July night.
But Perseus quailed not. "Little were my might,"
He said, "if helpless on the earth I were;
But to the equal gods my life is dear,
And certes victory over Jove's own son
By earthly men shall not be lightly won."
So spake he, moving inward from the door,
But louder laughed the black king than before,
And all his people shouted at his beck;
Therewith he cried, "Break now this Prince's neck,
And take him forth and hang him up straightway
Before my door, that henceforth from this day
Pigmies and jesters may take better heed,
Lest at our hands they gain a liar's meed."
Then started up two huge men from the board,
And Perseus, seeing them come, half drew his sword,
Looking this way and that; but in a while,
Upon his wallet with a deadly smile
He set his hand, and forth the head he drew,
Dead, white midst golden hair, where serpents blue
Yet dangled dead; and ere they stooped to take
His outstretched arms, before them he did shake
The dreadful thing: then stopped they suddenly,
Stone dead, without a wound or any cry.
Then toward the King he held aloft the head,
And as he stiffened cried at him, and said,
"O King! when such a gift I bring to thee,

Wilt thou be dumb and neither hear nor see?
Listen how sing thy men, and in thy hall
How swift the merry dancers' feet do fall!"
For now these, thinking him some god to be,
Cried in their fear, and made great haste to flee,
Crowding about the great doors of the hall,
Until not one was left of great or small,
But the dead king, and those that there had died.—
—Lo, in such way Medusa's head was tried!
But when the living giant-folk were gone,
And with the dead men there he stood alone,
He turned him to the food that thereby lay,
And ate and drank with none to say him nay;
And on the floor at last he laid him down,
Midst heaps of unknown tawny skins and brown.
There all the night in dreamless sleep he lay,
But rose again at the first streak of day,
And looking round about rejoiced to see
The uncouth image of his enemy,
Silent for ever, with wide mouth agape
E'en as he died; and thought, 'Who now shall 'scape
When I am angry, while this gift I have?
How well my needy lovers I may save
While this dread thing still hangeth by my side!'
Then out he passed: a plain burnt up, and wide,
He saw before him, bare of any trees,
And much he longed for the green dashing seas,
And merry winds of the sweet island shore,
Fain of the gull's cry, for the lion's roar.

Yet, glad at heart, he lifted up his feet
From the parched earth, and soon the air did beat,
Going north-east, and flew forth all the day,
And when the night fell still was on the way;
And many a sandy plain did he pass o'er,
And many a dry much-trodden river shore,
Where thick the thirsty beasts stood in the night.
The stealthy leopard saw him with affright,
As whining from the thicket it crept out;
The lion drew back at his sudden shout
From off the carcass of some slaughtered beast;
And the thin jackals waiting for the feast
Stinted their hungry howls as he passed by;
And black men sleeping, as he came anigh
Dreamed ugly dreams, and reached their hands to seize
The spear or sword that lay across their knees.

So at the last the sea before him lay,
And yet, therefore, he made not any stay,
But flew on till the night began to wane,
And the grey sea was blue and green again;
Until the sunlight on his wings shone fair,
And turned to red the gold locks of his hair.
Then in a little while he saw no land,
But all was heaving sea on every hand,
Driven this way and that way by the wind.
Still fast he flew, thinking some coast to find,
And so, about the middle of the day,
Far to the east a land before him lay,

And when unto it he was come anigh
He saw the sea beat on black cliffs and high,
With green grass growing on the tops of them,
Binding them round as gold a garment's hem.
Then slowly alongside thereof he flew
If haply by some sign the land he knew,
Until a ness he reached, whereon there stood
A tower new-built of mighty beams of wood;
So nigh he came that, unseen, he could see
Pale haggard faces peering anxiously
From out its well-barred windows that looked forth
Into a bay that lay upon the north;
But inland over moveless waves of down
Shone the white walls of some great royal town.
Now underneath the scarped cliffs of the bay
From horn to horn a belt of sand there lay
Fast lessening as the flood-tide swallowed it,
There all about did the sea-swallows flit,
And from the black rocks yellow hawks flew down,
And cormorants fished amidst the sea-weed brown,
Or on the low rocks nigh unto the sea,
While over all the fresh wind merrily
Blew from the sea, and o'er the pale blue sky
Thin clouds were stretched the way the wind went by,
And forward did the mighty waters press
As though they loved the green earth's stedfastness.
Nought slept, but everything was bright and fair
Beneath the bright sun and the noon-day air.

Now hovering there, he seemed to hear a sound
Unlike the sea-bird's cry, and, looking round,
He saw a figure standing motionless
Beneath the cliff, midway 'twixt ness and ness,
And as the wind lull'd heard that cry again,
That sounded like the wail of one in pain;
Wondering thereat, and seeking marvels new
He lighted down, and toward the place he drew,
And made invisible by Pallas' aid,
He came within the scarped cliff's purple shade,
And found a woman standing lonely there,
Naked, except for tresses of her hair
That o'er her white limbs by the breeze were wound,
And brazen chains her weary arms that bound
Unto the sea-beat overhanging rock,
As though her golden-crowned head to mock.
But nigh her feet upon the sand there lay
Rich raiment that had covered her that day,
Worthy to be the ransom of a king,
Unworthy round such loveliness to cling.

Alas, alas! no bridal play this was,
The tremors that throughout her limbs did pass,
Her restless eyes, the catching of her breath,
Were but the work of the cold hand of death,
She waited for, midst untold miseries,
As, now with head cast back, and close-shut eyes
She wailed aloud, and now all spent with woe
Stared out across the rising sea, as though

She deemed each minute brought the end anigh
For which in her despair she needs must cry.

Then unseen Perseus stole anigh the maid,
And love upon his heart a soft hand laid,
And tender pity rent it for her pain,
Nor yet an eager cry could he refrain,
As now, transformed by that piteous sight,
Grown like unto a god for pride and might,
Down on the sand the mystic cap he cast
And stood before her with flushed face at last,
And grey eyes glittering with his great desire
Beneath his hair, that like a harmless fire
Blown by the wind shone in her hopeless eyes.
But she, all rigid with her first surprise,
Ceasing her wailing as she heard his cry,
Stared at him, dumb with fear and misery,
Shrunk closer yet unto the rocky place
And writhed her bound hands as to hide her face;
But sudden love his heart did so constrain,
With open mouth he strove to speak in vain
And from his heart the hot tears 'gan to rise;
But she midst fear beheld his kind grey eyes,
And then, as hope came glimmering through her dread,
In a weak voice he scarce could hear, she said,
"O Death! if thou hast risen from the sea,
Sent by the gods to end this misery,
I thank them that thou comest in this form,
Who rather thought to see a hideous worm

Come trailing up the sands from out the deep,
Or suddenly swing over from the steep
To lap me in his folds, and bone by bone
Crush all my body: come then, with no moan,
Will I make ready now to leave the light.
"But yet—thy face is wonderful and bright;
Art thou a god? Ah, then be kind to me!
Is there no valley far off from the sea
Where I may live alone, afar from strife
Nor anger any god with my poor life?
Or do the gods delight in misery
And art thou come to mock me ere I die?
Alas, must they be pitiless, when they
Fear not the hopeless slayer of the day!
Speak, speak! what meanest thou by that sad smile?
"O, if the gods could be but men awhile
And learn such fearful things unspeakable
As I have learned this morn, what man can tell
What golden age might wrap the world again—
Ah, dost thou love me, is my speech not vain?
Did not my beauty perish on this morn
Dost thou not kiss me now for very scorn?
Alas, my shame, I cannot flee from thee!
Alas, my sin! no green-stemmed laurel tree
Shall mock thy grasp, no misty mountain stream
Shall wake thee shuddering from a lovely dream,
No helping god shall hear, but thou alone!—
Help me, I faint! I see not! art thou gone?
Alas! thy lips were warm upon my brow,

What good deed will it be to leave me now!
"Oh, yet I feel thy kind and tender hand
On my chained wrist, and thou wilt find some land
Where I may live a little, free from fear?
"And yet, and yet, if thou hast sought me here
Being but a man, no manly thing it is,
Nor hope thou from henceforth to live in bliss,
If here thou wrongest me, who am but dead."
Then as she might she hung adown her head,
Her bosom heaved with sobs, and from her eyes
Long dried amidst those hopeless miseries
Unchecked the salt tears o'er her bosom ran
As love and shame their varying strife began.
But overwhelmed with pity, mad with love
Stammering, nigh weeping spoke the son of Jove,—
"Alas, what land is this, where such as thou
Are thus tormented? look upon me now,
And cease thy fear! no evil man am I,
No cruel god to mock thy misery;
But the gods help me, and their unmoved will
Has sent me here to save thee from some ill,
I know not what; to give thee rest from this,
And unto me unutterable bliss,
If from a man thou takest not away
The gift thou gavest to a god to-day;
But I may be a very god to thee,
Because the gods are helpful unto me,
Nor would I fear them aught if thou wert nigh,
Since unto each it happeneth once to die.

"Speak not, sweet maid, till I have loosed thine hands
From out the grasp of these unworthy bands."
So straight, and ere her lips could frame a word,
From out its sheath he drew the gleaming sword,
And while she shut her dazzled eyes for fear
To see the glittering marvel draw anear,
Unto her side her weary arms fell freed;
Then must she shrink away, for now indeed
With rest and hope and growing love there came
Remembrance of her helplessness and shame,
Weeping she said, "My fate is but to die,
Forget the wild words of my misery,
Take a poor maiden's thanks, and leave this place,
Nor for thy pity die before my face,
As verily thou wilt if thou stay'st here;
Because, however free thou art from fear,
What hopest thou against this beast to do,
My death, and thine unconquerable foe?
When all a kingdom's strength has had no hope
With this strange horror, God-endowed, to cope,
But deemed it good to give up one poor maid
Unto his wrath, who makes the world afraid."
"Nay," said he, "but thy fate shall be my fate,
And on these sands thy bane will I await,
Though I know nought of all his mightiness:
For scarcely yet a man, I none the less
Such things have done as make me now a name,
Nor can I live a loveless life of shame,
Or leave thee now, this day's most god-like gain,

To suffer some unknown and mortal pain."

She, hurrying as he spoke, with trembling hands
Had lifted up her raiment from the sands,
And yet therewith she was not well arrayed,
Before she turned round, ghastly white, and said,
"Look seaward and behold, my death draw nigh,
Not thine—not thine,—but kiss me ere I die;
Alas! how many things I had to tell,
For certainly I should have loved thee well."
He came to her and kissed her as she sank
Into his arms, and from the horror shrank,
Clinging to him, scarce knowing he was there;
But through the drifting wonder of her hair,
Amidst his pity, he beheld the sea,
And saw a huge wave rising mightily
Above the smaller breakers of the shore,
Which in its green breast for a minute bore
A nameless horror, that it cast aland,
And left, a huge mass on the oozing sand,
That scarcely seemed a living thing to be,
Until at last those twain it seemed to see,
And gathering up its strange limbs, towards them passed.
And therewithal a dismal trumpet-blast
Rang from the tower, and from the distant town
The wind in answer brought loud wails adown.
Then Perseus gently put the maid from him,
Who sank down shivering in her every limb,
Silent despite herself for fear and woe,

As down the beech he ran to meet the foe.
But he, beholding Jove's son drawing near,
A great black fold against him did uprear,
Maned with grey tufts of hair, as some old tree
Hung round with moss, in lands where vapours be;
From his bare skull his red eyes glowed like flame,
And from his open mouth a sound there came,
Strident and hideous, that still louder grew
As that rare sight of one in arms he knew:
But godlike, fearless, burning with desire,
The adamant jaws and lidless eyes of fire
Did Perseus mock, and lightly leapt aside
As forward did the torture-chamber glide
Of his huge head, and ere the beast could turn,
One moment bright did blue-edged Herpe burn,
The next was quenched in the black flow of blood;
Then in confused folds the hero stood,
His bright face shadowed by the jaws of death,
His hair blown backward by the poisonous breath;
But all that passed, like lightning-lighted street
In the dark night, as the blue blade did meet
The wrinkled neck, and with no faltering stroke,
Like a god's hand the fell enchantment broke,
And then again in place of crash and roar,
He heard the shallow breakers on the shore,
And o'er his head the sea-gull's plaintive cry,
Careless as gods for who might live or die.

Then Perseus from the slimy loathsome coil

Drew out his feet, and then with little toil
Smote off the head, the terror of the lands,
And, dragging it along, went up the sands,
Shouting aloud for joy, "Arise, arise,
O thou whose name I know not! Ope thine eyes
To see the gift, that I, first seen to-day,
Am hastening now before thy feet to lay!
Look up, look up! What shall thy sweet face be,
That I have seen amidst such misery,
When thou at last beginnest to rejoice."

Slowly she rose, her burdened heart found voice
In sobs and murmurs inarticulate,
And clean forgetting all the sport of fate,
She scarce could think that she should ever die,
As locked in fearless, loving, strait embrace,
They made a heaven of that lone sandy place.

Then on a rock smoothed by the washing sea
They sat, and eyed each other lovingly.
And few words at the first the maiden said,
So wrapped she was in all the goodlihead
Of her new life made doubly happy now:
For her alone the sea-breeze seemed to blow,
For her in music did the white surf fall,
For her alone the wheeling birds did call
Over the shallows, and the sky for her
Was set with white clouds, far away and clear;
E'en as her love, this strong and lovely one
Who held her hand, was but for her alone.

But after loving silence for a while,

She, turning round to him her heavenly smile,
Said, "Tell me, O my love, what name is thine,
What mother brought thee forth so nigh divine,
Whence art thou come to take away my shame?"

Then said he, "Fair love, Perseus is my name,
Not known of men, though that may come to be;
And her that bore me men call Danaë,
And tales of my begetting people tell
And call my father, Jove: but it befell
Unto my mother, when I first was born,
That she, cast out upon the sea, forlorn
Of help of men, unto Seriphos came;
And there she dwells as now, not gathering shame,
But called a Queen; and thence I come indeed,
Sent by the gods to help thee in thy need."

Then he began and told her everything
Down to the slaying of the monstrous king,
She listening to him meanwhile, glad at heart
That he had played so fair and great a part.
But all being told, she said, "This salt pool nigh
Left by the tide, now mirrors well the sky,
So smooth it is, and now I stand anear
Canst thou not see my foolish visage clear,
Yea, e'en the little gems upon my hands?
May I not see this marvel of the lands
So mirrored, and yet live—make no delay
The sea is pouring fast into the bay,
And we must soon be gone."

"Look down," he said,

"And take good heed thou turnest not thine head."
Then gazing down, with shuddering dread and awe,
Over her imaged shoulder, soon she saw
The head rise up, so beautiful and dread,
That, white and ghastly, yet seemed scarcely dead
Beside the image of her own fair face,
As, daring not to move from off the place,
But trembling sore, she cried, "Enough, O love!
What man shall doubt thou art the son of Jove;
I think thou wilt not die!" then with her hand
She hid her eyes, and trembling did she stand
Until she felt his lips upon her cheek;
Then turning round, with anxious eyes and meek,
She gazed upon him, and some doubtful thought
Up to her brow the tender colour brought,
And sinking somewhat down her golden head,
Stammering a little now these words she said,—

"O godlike man, thou dost not ask my name,
Or why folk gave me up to death and shame;
Dost thou not dread I am some sorceress,
Whose evil deeds well earned me that distress?"

"Tell me thy name," he said; "yet as for thee
I deem that thou wert bound beside the sea,
Because the gods would have the dearest thing
Thy land possessed for its own ransoming."

She said, "O love, the sea is rising fast,
And time it is that we henceforth were past;
The only path that leadeth to the down
Is far, and thence a good way is the town;

Come then, and on our journey will I tell
How all these things, now come to nought, befell."
"Lead mè," he said, and lifted from the sand
The monster's head; and therewith, hand in hand,
Together underneath the cliffs they went,
The while she told her tale to this intent.

"This is the Syrian land, this town anigh
Is Joppa, and Andromeda am I,
Daughter of him who holds the sceptre there,
King Cepheus and Cassiope the fair.
"She, smit by cruel madness, brought ill fate,
Upon the land to make it desolate;
For by the place whence thou deliveredst me,
An altar to the daughters of the sea
Erewhile there stood, and we in solemn wise,
Unto the maids were wont to sacrifice,
And give them gifts of honey, oil, and wine,
That we might have the love of folk divine;
And so it chanced that on a certain day,
When from that place the sea was ebbed away,
Upon the firm sands I and many a maid
About that altar went, while the flutes played
Such notes as sea-folk love; and as we went
Upon the wind rich incense-clouds we sent
About the hallowed stone, whereon there lay
Fruits of the earth for them to bear away;
Thus did we maids, as we were wont to do,
And watching us, as was their wont also,

Our mothers stood, my own amidst the rest.
" But ere the rites were done, as one possessed
She cried aloud, 'Alas, what do we now,
Such honour unto unseen folk to show!
To spend our goods, our labour, and our lives,
In serving these the careless sea-wind drives
Hither and thither through the booming seas;
While thou Andromeda art queen of these,
And in thy limbs such lovely godhead moves,
That thou shalt be new Mother of the Loves;
Thou shalt not die! Go child, and sit alone,
And take our homage on thy golden throne;
And I that bore thee will but be thy slave,
Nor shall another any worship have.'
" Trembling awhile we stood with heads downcast,
To hear those words, then from the beach we passed;
And sick at heart each went unto her home
Expecting when the fearful death should come,
Like those of Thebes, who, smit by arrows, fell
Before the feet of her who loved too well.
" And yet stayed not my mother's madness there;
She caused men make a silver image fair
Of me unhappy, round the base she writ
'*Fairest of all*,' and bade men carry it,
With flowers and music, down unto the sea,
Who on the altar fixed it solidly
Against the beating of the winds and waves.
" But we, expecting now no quiet graves,
Trembled at every murmur of the night,

And if a cloud should hide the noon sun bright
Grew faint with terror; yet the days went by
Harmless above our great iniquity,
Until one wretched morn I woke to hear,
Down in the street loud wails and cries of fear,
And my heart died within me, nor durst I
Ask for the reason of that bitter cry,
Though soon I knew it—nigh unto the sea
Were gathered folk for some festivity;
When, at the happiest moment of their feast,
Forth from the deep there came a fearful beast
No man could name, who quickly snatched away
Their fairest maid, and with small pain did slay
Such men as there in arms before him stood;
For unto him was steel as rotten wood,
And darts as straw—nor grew the story old,
Day after day e'en such a tale was told.
—Kiss me, my love! I grow afraid again;
Kiss me amid the memory of my pain.
Draw me to thee, that I thine arms may feel,
A better help than triple brass or steel!
"Alas, love! folk began to look on me
With angry eyes, and mutter gloomily,
As pale and trembling through the streets I passed;
And from the heavy thunder-cloud, at last
The dreadful lightning quivered through the air:
For on a day the people filled the square
With arms and tumult, and my name I heard,
But heard no more; for, shuddering and afeard,

Unto my far-off quiet bower I fled,
And from that moment deemed myself but dead.
How the time passed I know not, what they did
I know not now; for like a quail half hid,
When the hawk's pinions shade the sun from him,
Crouching adown, I felt my life wax dim.

"The gods have made us mighty certainly
That we can bear such things and yet not die.
This morn—Ah, love, and was it yet this year,
Wherein thou camest to me, kind and dear?—
This morn they brought me forth, they did on me
This mocking raiment bright with bravery;
They mocked my head with gold, with gems my feet,
My heart with lovely songs and music sweet.
Thou wouldst have wept to see me led along
Amidst that dreary pomp with flowers and song,
But if folk wept, how could I note it then;
Most vain to me were grown all ways of men.

"They brought me to mine image on the sands,
They took it down, they bore it in their hands
To deck mine empty tomb, I think, and then—
O cruel is the fearfulness of men,
Striving a little while to 'scape death's pain!—
My naked body they spared not to chain,
Lest I should 'scape the death from which they fled,
Then left me there alone and shamed—and dead—
While to his home each went again, to live
Such vain forgetful life as fate might give.

"O love, to think that love can pass away,
That, soon or late, to us shall come a day
When this shall be forgotten! e'en this kiss
That makes us now forget the high God's bliss,
And sons of men with all their miseries."

"Turn round," he said, "and let your well-loved eyes
Behold the sea from this high grassy hill,
And thou shalt see the risen waves now fill
The bay from horn to horn of it: no more
Thy footprints bless the shell-strewn sandy shore,
The vale the monster scooped as 'neath my sword
He writhed, the black stream that from out him poured,
The rock we sat on, and the pool wherein
Thou sawest the gods' revenge for heedless sin—
How the green ripples of the shallow sea
Cover the strife and passion peacefully,
Nor lack the hallowing of the low broad sun.
"So has love stolen upon us, lovely one,
And quenched our old lives in this new delight,
And if thou needs must think of that dull night
That creepeth on no otherwise than this,
Yet for that thought hold closer to thy bliss,
Come nigher, come! forget the more thy pain."

So there of all love's feasting were they fain,
Words fail to tell the joyance that they had,
And with what words they made each other glad.

SO, as it drew to ending of the day,
Unto the city did they take their way,
And when they stood before its walls at last
They found the heavy gate thereof shut fast,
And no one on the walls for very shame;
Then to the wicket straightway Perseus came,
And down the monster's grinning head he threw,
While on the horn a mighty blast he blew,
But no one answered; then he cried aloud,
"Come forth, O warders, and no more shrink cowed
Behind your battlements! one man alone
Has dared to do what thousands have not done,
And the great beast besides the sea lies dead:
Come forth, come forth! and gaze upon this head!"
Then opened was the door a little way,
And one peered forth and saw him with the may,
And turning round some joyous words he cried
Unto the rest, who oped the great gates wide,
And through them Perseus the saved maiden led.
Then as the folk cast eyes upon the head,
They stopped their shouts to gaze thereon with fear,
And timidly the women drew anear;
But soon, beholding Perseus' godlike grace,
His mighty limbs, and flushed and happy face,
Cried out unto the maid, "O happy thou,
Who art well paid for every trouble now,
In winning such a godlike man as this."

And many there were fain his skirts to kiss;
But he smiled down on them, and said, "Rejoice,
O girls, indeed, but yet lift heart and voice
Unto the gods to-day, and not to me!
For they it was who sent me to this sea.
And first of all fail not to bless the Maid
Through whom it came that I was not afraid."
So through the streets they went, and quickly spread
News that the terror of the land was dead.
And folk thronged round to see the twain go by,
Or went before with flowers and minstrelsy,
Rejoicing for the slaying of their shame.

Thus harbinger'd the happy lovers came
Unto King Cepheus' royal house of gold.
To whom by this the joyful cries had told
That all was changed and still his days were good,
So, eager in his well-built porch he stood,
No longer now in mournful raiment clad.
But when they met, then were those two more glad
Than words can say; there came her mother, too,
And round about her neck fair arms she threw,
Weeping for joy; and all about the King
The great men stood and eyed the fearful thing
That lay at Perseus' feet: then the King said,
"O thou, who on this day hast saved my maid,
Wilt thou rule half my kingdom from to-day?
Or wilt thou carry half my wealth away?
Or in some temple shall we honour thee,

Setting thine image up beside the sea?
Ask what thou wilt before these mighty lords,
And straightway is it thine without more words."

Then in his heart laughed Perseus: and, "O King,"
He said, "I ask indeed a mighty thing;
Yet neither will I take thy wealth away,
Or make thee less a King than on this day,
And in no temple shall mine image stand
To look upon the sea that beats this land,
For fear the God who now is friend to me
Thereby should come to be mine enemy;
And yet on this day am I grown so bold,
I ask a greater gift than power or gold;
Give me thy maiden saved, to be my bride,
And let me go, because the world is wide,
And the gods hate me not, and I am fain
Some fertile land with these my hands to gain.
Nor think thereby that thou wilt get thee shame,
For if thou askest of my race and name,
Perseus I am, the son of Danaë,
Born nigh to Argos, by the sounding sea,
And those that know, call me the son of Jove,
Who in past days my mother's face did love."

Then, glad at heart, the King said, "Poor indeed
Were such a gift, to give thee to thy meed
This that thine own unconquered hands have won.
O ye! bring now the head and cast thereon
Jewels and gold from out my treasury,
Till nothing of its grimness men can see;

And let folk bring round to the harbour's mouth
My ship that saileth yearly to the south;
That to his own land since it is his will
This Prince may go; nor yet without his fill
Of that which all men long for everywhere,
Honour, and gold, and women kind and fair.
And ye, O lords, to-morrow ere midday,
Come hither to my house in great array,
For then this marriage will we solemnize,
Appeasing all the gods with gifts of price."
Then loud all shouted, and the end of day
Being come, Andromeda was led away
Unto her bower, and there within a while
She fell asleep, and in her sleep did smile,
For on the calm of that forgetfulness
Her bliss some happy longings did impress.
But in the Syrian King's adorned hall
Sat Perseus till the shadows 'gan to fall
Shorter beneath the moon, and still he thought
Amid the feast of what a day had brought
Unto his heart, a foolish void before,
And for the morrow must he long so sore
That all those joyances and minstrelsy
Seemed unto him but empty things to be.

Early next morn the city was astir,
And country folk came in from far and near
Hearing the joyous tidings that the beast
Was dead, and fain to see the marriage feast,

And joyous folk wandered from street to street
Crowned with fair flowers and singing carols sweet.
Then to the maiden's chamber maidens came,
And woke her up to love and joyous shame,
And as the merry sun streamed through the room
Spread out unequalled marvels of the loom,
Stored up for such an end in days long done,
Ere yet her grey eyes looked upon the sun,
Fine webs like woven mist, wrought in the dawn,
Long ere the dew had left the sunniest lawn,
Gold cloth so wrought that nought of gold seemed there,
But rather sunlight over blossoms fair;
You would have said that gods had made them, bright,
To hide her body from the common light
Lest men should die from unfulfilled desire.
Gems too they showed wrought by the hidden fire
That eats the world, and from the unquiet sea
Pearls worth the ransom of an argosy.
Yet all too little all these riches seemed
In worship of her, who as one who dreamed,
By her fair maidens' hands was there arrayed,
Then, with loose hair, ungirded as a maid
Unto the threshold of the house was brought,
But when her hand familiar fingers caught
And when that voice, that erst amidst her fear
She deemed a god's, now smote upon her ear
Like one new-born to heaven she seemed to be.
But dreamlike was the long solemnity,
Unreal the joyous streets, where yesterday

She passed half dead upon her wretched way;
And though before the flickering altar flame
She trembled when she thought of that past shame,
And midst the shouting knit her brows to think
Of what a cup these men had bidden her drink,
Unreal they seemed, forgotten as a tale
We cannot tell, though it may still avail
For pensive thoughts betwixt the day and night.
All things unto the gods were done aright;
Beside the sea the flame and smoke uprose
Over rich gifts of many things to those
A woman's tongue had wounded; golden veils
And images, and bowls wrought o'er with tales,
By all the altars of the gods were laid;
On this last day of maidenhood the maid
Had stood before the shrines, and there had thrown
Sweet incense on the flame, and through the town
The praises of immortals had been sung,
And sacred flowers about the houses hung;
And now the last hours of the dreamlike day
Amid great feasting slowly passed away.

But in that land there was a mighty lord,
To whom erewhile the King had pledged his word
That he should wed Andromeda, and he
Heard through sure friends of this festivity
And raged thereat, and thought that eve to come
Unbidden to the feast and bear her home;
Phineus his name was, great amidst great men.

He setting out, came to the great hall when
The sun was well-nigh down, all armed was he,
And at his back came on tumultuously
His armed men-slaves, and folk that loved him dear.

Beholding him, the King rose up in fear,
And all about the place scared folk uprose
As men surprised at feast by deadly foes;
But Perseus laughing said, "What feat do ye
This eve in honour of my sweet and me?
Or are ye but the servants of the King
Returned from doing for him some great thing
In a far land? then sit here and be glad,
For on this day the king feeds good and bad."

Then inarticulate with rage and grief
Phineus turned on him, snatching at a sheaf
Of darts that hung against a pillar there,
And hurled one at him, that sung through his hair
And smote a serving man down by his side;
Then finding voice, he faced the King and cried,
"What dost thou drinking with this robber here,
Who comes to steal that which I hold so dear
That on my knees I prayed for her to thee?
Speak, Cepheus! wilt thou give her yet to me
And have good peace withal, or wilt thou die?
Ho, friends, and ye that follow, cry my cry!"

Then straight the hall rang with a mighty shout
Of "Phineus," and from sheath and belt leapt out
The gleaming steel, and Cepheus stammering

Took heart to say, "Think well upon this thing;
What should I do? the man did save her life,
And her he might have made his slave, as wife
He asks for now; take gifts and go thy way
Nor quench in blood the joyance of this day."

Then forth stood Perseus with a frowning face
Before them all, and cried out from his place,
"Get ye behind my back, all friends to me!
And ere the lamps are lighted ye shall see
A stranger thing than ye have ever dreamed;"
And as he spake in his left hand there gleamed
The gold-wrought satchel; but amazed and cowed
Did the King's friends behind the hero crowd,
Who, ere from out the bag he drew the head,
Unto that band of fierce new-comers said;
"Will ye have life or death? if life, then go
And on the grass outside your armour throw,
And then returning, drink to my delight
Until the summer sun puts out the night."

But loud they shouted, swaying to and fro,
And mocked at him, and cried aloud to know
If in his hand Jove's thunderbolt he had,
Or Mars' red sword that makes the eagles glad;
But Phineus, raging, cried, "Take him alive,
That we for many an hour the wretch may drive
With thongs and clubs until he longs to die!"

Then all set on him with a mighty cry,
But, with a shout that thrilled high over theirs,
He drew the head out by the snaky hairs

And turned on them the baleful glassy eyes;
Then sank to silence all that storm of cries
And clashing arms; the tossing points that shone
In the last sunbeams, went out one by one
As the sun left them, for each man there died,
E'en as the shepherd on the bare hill-side,
Smitten amid the grinding of the storm;
When, while the hare lies flat in her wet form,
E'en strong men quake for fear in houses strong,
And nigh the ground the lightning runs along.

But upright on their feet the dead men stood,
In brow and cheek still flushed the angry blood;
This smiled, the mouth of that was open wide,
This other drew the great sword from his side,
All were at point to do this thing or that.

As silent in the hall the living sat
As those dead men, till Perseus turned at last
And over all a kingly look he cast,
And said, "O friends, drink yet one cup to me,
And then to-morrow will I try the sea
With this my love; and, sweet Andromeda,
Forgive me that I needs must play this play;
Forget it, sweet! thou wilt not see again
This land of thine, upland, or hill, or plain;
There where we go shall all be new to thee
Except the love that thou hast won from me."
Then to her frightened face there came a smile,
And in her cheeks within a little while

Sweet colour came again; but right few words
Upon that night were said of king or lords.

But soon again the lovers were alone
Of all the sons of men remembering none,
Forgetting every god but him whose bow
About the vexed and flowery earth doth go.

SO on the morn, when risen was the sun
About the capstan did the shipmen run,
Warping the great ship to the harbour mouth
That yearly went for treasures to the south,
And thither from the palace did men bear
Bales of rich cloth, and golden vessels rare,
And gold new coined, and silver bars of weight.
And women-slaves with bodies slim and straight
Stood on the snow-white deck, and strong men-slaves
Brought from some conquered land beyond the waves
Bore down rich burdens; so when all things due
Were laid on ship-board, and to noon it grew
Thither came Perseus with his new-wed wife,
And she, as losing somewhat of her life
Was pensive now, and silent, and regret
Must move her that her heart must soon forget
All folk and things where first her life began,

Yea, e'en the mother, whose worn face and wan,
Tearless and haughty, yet looked o'er the sea,
As though the life wherein no good could be
She still would bear in every god's despite —
—Ah, folk forget; the damsel's heart grew light
E'en while her country's cliffs she yet could see.
Should she remember, when so lovingly
That cheek touched hers, and he was hers alone?

Love while ye may; if twain grow into one
'Tis for a little while; the time goes by,
No hatred 'twixt the pair of friends doth lie,
No troubles break their hearts — and yet, and yet —
How could it be? we strove not to forget;
Rather in vain to that old time we clung,
Its hopes and wishes round our hearts we hung,
We played old parts, we used old names — in vain,
We go our ways, and twain once more are twain;
Let pass — at latest when we come to die
Thus shall the fashion of the world go by.
But these, while still at brightest love's flame burned.
Were glad indeed, as towards Seriphos turned
Bright shone their gilded prow against the sun.

Meanwhile the folk of Joppa, one by one,
Took Phineus' people and their master dead
All turned to stone as they had seen the head,
And in a lonely place they set them down,
Upon a hill that overlooked the town,

And round about them built a wall, four-square,
And at each corner raised a temple fair,
And therein altars made they unto Jove,
Pallas, and Neptune, and the God of Love;
And in Jove's temple carved that history,
That those who came there after them might see,
From first to last, how all these things were done,
And how these men last looked upon the sun.

But the two lovers going on their way
Grew happier still, as bright day followed day;
And, the wind favouring, in a little while
They reached the low shore of the well-loved isle;
And, having beached the well-built keel, took land
Where Danae's boat first touched the yellow sand.
Then cityward alone did Perseus go
His fatal gift unto the King to show;
And, passing through the fair fields hastily,
Reached the green precinct, where he thought to see
His mother, he had left alive and well;
But from inside upon his ears there fell
A noise of shrieks and clashing arms and shouts;
Thereto he ran beset with many doubts,
Since Polydectes' evil wiles he knew,
And what a fate he erst had doomed him to;
So, hurrying through, he reached the shrine at last,
And there beheld his mother, her arms cast
About Minerva's image, and by her
Good Dictys, who, with shield and glittering spear,

Abode the onslaught of an armed band,
At head of whom did Polydectes stand.
Then to her side sprang Perseus with a cry,
And at that sight and sound she joyfully
Said, "Com'st thou, long desired? nought fear I now,
This kingly traitor soon shall lie alow."
Then the King tottered backward, and awhile
Stood staring at him: but an evil smile
Soon hid his fear, as, turning, he beheld
The glittering weapons that his stout slaves held,
And he cried out, "Yea, art thou back again?
And was my story forged for thee in vain?
Be merry then, but give me place or die!
I am not one to meet thee fearfully.
But thee, O brother, must I then slay thee,
And in our house must one more story be?
Give back! nor for a woman's foolishness,
Bring curses on the name thou shouldest bless.
—Set on at once then! take the three of them!"
Then once more clashed the spears, but on the hem
Of that dread satchel Perseus set his hand,
And put his friend aside, and took his stand
Betwixt his mother and the island men;
And terribly he cried, "Thus take thou then
The gift thou badst me bring to thee! nor ask
Of any man again another task,
Except to cast on thee a little sand
That thou may'st reach in peace the shadowy land."
His mocking speech he ended with a shout,

And from the bag the dreadful head drew out,
And shook it in the King's bewildered face;
Who unto him yet strove to make one pace
With feebly brandished spear and drooping shield,
Then unto stony death his heart did yield,
And without any cry upright he died,
With fallen arms and fixed eyes staring wide.
But of his men the bravest turned and fled,
And on the ground some trembled, well-nigh dead
For very fear, till Perseus cried, "Arise,
Lay down your arms and go! Henceforth be wise;
Nor at kings' biddings 'gainst the just gods strive."
But as they slunk away, too glad to live
To need more words, and shivering with their dread,
Once more did Perseus hide the fearful head,
And toward his mother turned; who, with pale face,
Stood trembling there, remembering that embrace
Within the brazen house; but now he threw
His arms about her as he used to do
When her own arms his little body bore;
And smiling, even as he smiled of yore,
He said, "O mother, fear me not at all,
But yet bethink thee of the brazen wall
And golden Jove, nor doubt from him I came;
And no more now shall I be called thy shame,
But thy defence and glory everywhere.

"But now to lovely Argos let us fare,
Too small a land this is become for thee,

And I may hope a greater sovereignty,
Who, by God's help, have done such mighty things,
Which I will tell thee of, while the wind sings
Amongst the shrouds of my rich-laden keel,
While by thy feet a god-given gift shall kneel,
My bride new won; in such-like guise will we
Come back to him who gave us to the sea,
And make our peace and all ill blood forget,
That through long happy years thou mayst live yet."

Then did he take good Dictys by the hand,
And said, "O righteous man, we leave this land,
Nor leave thee giftless for the welcoming
Thou gav'st us erst, nor for this other thing
That thou hast wrought for us this happy tide;
Therefore do thou as King herein abide,
And win Jove's love by helping in such wise
As thou didst us, folk sunk in miseries."

So gave he kingdoms, as he took away,
For strong the God was in him on that day,
And the gods smiled to hear him; yea, and she
Who armed him erst, then dealt so lovingly,
She caused the people's hearts towards him to yearn,
Who, thronging round, began somehow to learn
The story of his deeds, and cried aloud,
"Be thou our King!" Then showed he to the crowd
Dictys his friend, and said, "I to my kin
Must go, mine heritage and goods to win,
And a king, deal with kings; but yet see here
This royal man, my helpful friend and dear;

Loved of the gods, surely he is of worth
For greater things." So saying he went forth
And 'mid their reverence, leading by the hand
His happy mother, turned unto the strand;
And still the wondering folk with them must go,
And now such honour unto him would show,
That rather they would make him God than King;
But while fresh carols round him these did sing
They came unto the low, sea-beaten sand;
And Danae took the Syrian by the hand
And kissed her, full of joy that such an one
Should bear brave children to her godlike son:
Then Perseus gave commands, and on the shore
Great gifts they laid from out his plenteous store,
To glad King Dictys' eyes withal, and then
Bade farewell to him and his island men;
And all took ship, and hoisting sail straightway,
Departed o'er the restless plain and grey.

Now fair the wind was for a day and night,
But on the second day as it grew light,
And they were thinking that they soon should be
At Argos, rose a tempest on the sea,
And drave them from their course unto a land
Far north thereof. So on the yellow sand
They hauled their ship, and thereto presently
The good folk of the country drew anigh,
To make their market; and being asked, they said
That this was Thessaly, that strait paths led

Through rugged mountains to a fertile plain
Peneus watered, rich with many a fane:
That following down the stream they soon should come
Unto a mighty people's glorious home,
A god-loved ancient city, called of men
Larissa, and the time was fitting then
To go thereto, and there should they have rest,
For now each comer was an honoured guest,
Because Teutamias, the Thessalian king,
His father dead with games was honouring.
Then to that city Perseus fain would go,
His might unto the gathered men to show;
Desiring, too, to gather tidings there
Of how the old Acrisius yet might fare,
And if unto his scarce-seen Argive home
He in good peace might venture now to come.
So of the country folk he took fair steeds
And gave them gold, and goods for all their needs,
And with a trusty band with this intent
Through the rough passes of the hills he went,
Bearing his mother, and the Syrian may:
As of a king's men deemed of his array,
When to the fertile peopled fields he came;
But yet he bade that none should tell his name.
So coming to Larissa, all men thought,
That he who with him such great marvels brought
Was some great king, though scanty was his band;
So honour did he get on every hand.
But when the games began, and none could win

A prize in any, if he played therein,
A greater name they gave him, saying, "What worth
In this poor age is left upon the earth
To do such deeds? Surely no man this is,
But some god weary of the heavenly bliss."

At last, when all the other games were done,
Men fell to play at casting of the stone;
And strong men cast it, mighty of their hands,
Bearers of great names in the Grecian lands:
But Perseus stood and watched the play alone,
Nor did he move when every man had thrown.
Then cried Teutamias, "Nameless one! see now
How mightily these strong-armed heroes throw:
Canst thou prevail in this as in the rest?"

"O King!" said Perseus, "now I think it best
To try the Fates no more; I must be gone:
Therefore to-day thou seest me thus alone,
For in the house my white-armed damsels stay
To order matters for our homeward way."

"Nay, stranger," said the King, "but rather take
This golden garland for Teutamias' sake,
And try one cast: look, here I have with me
A well-loved guest, who is most fain to see
Thy godlike strength, yea we will draw anigh
To watch the heavy stone like Jove's bolt fly
Forth from thine hand." Then Perseus smiled and said,
"Nay then, be wary, and guard well thine head!
For who of mortals knoweth where and when
The bolts of Jove shall smite down foolish men?"

So said he, and withal the King drew nigh,
And with him an old man, who anxiously
Peered round him as if looking for a foe;
Then Perseus made him ready for the throw,
But even as he stooped the stone to raise,
The old man said, "That I the more may praise
This hero's cast, come to the other end
And we shall see the hill of granite send
The earth and stones up as its course is spent."
So then beyond the furthest cast they went
By some three yards, and stood aside; but now
Since it was evening and the sun was low
Its beams were in their eyes, nor could they see
If Perseus moved or not, then restlessly
Looking this way or that, the ancient man,
Gathering his garments up, in haste began
To cross the place, but when a warning shout
Rang in his ears, then wavering and in doubt
He stopped, and scarcely had he time to hear
A second cry of horror and of fear,
Ere crushed, and beaten down upon the ground,
The end of all his weary life he found.

Then women shrieked, and strong men shouted out,
And Perseus ran to those that drew about
The slain old man, and asked them of his name,
But the King, eyeing him as nigh he came,
Said, "This we know, and thy hid name we know,
For certainly thou art his fated foe,

His very daughter's strange-begotten son,
The child the sea cast up, the dreaded one.
This was Acrisius, who for fear of thee
Shut up thy mother by the sounding sea;
This was the man, who, for the very dread
Of meeting thee, from lovely Argos fled
To be my guest. Nay, let thy sharp sword bide
Within its sheath, the world is fair and wide,
Nor have we aught to do to thee for this;
Go then in peace, and live in woe or bliss
E'en as thou may'st, but stay with us no more,
Because we fear the gods may plague us sore
For this thy deed, though they would have it so."

Then soberly thenceforth did Perseus go
Unto his folk, and straightly told them all
That on that luckless day had chanced to fall;
Wondering thereat, there made they no delay
But down unto the sea they took their way;
And much did Danae ponder as they went
How the high gods had wrought out their intent,
And thinking on these things she needs must sigh
For pity of her sweet life passing by.

But when they reached the border of the sea,
Then Perseus said, "Though all unwittingly
I slew this man, and though perchance of right
His throne is mine, yet never will I fight
Against the just gods, and I fear the stain
Of kindred blood, if slaying him I gain

His kingdom and the city of my birth:
Now, therefore, since the gods have made the earth
Most fair in many places, let us go
Where'er the god-sent fated wind shall blow
The ship, that carries one the high gods love.
But first the armed lovely Maid of Jove
Here let us worship, on this yellow beach,
That her, my helper erst, we may beseech
To grant us much, and first of all things, this,
A land where we may dwell awhile in bliss."

They heard him gladly, for the most of those
Were young, nor yet by mishaps and by foes
Had learned to think the world a dreary thing;
So round about the altar did they sing
And feasted well, and when the day came round
Once more, they went a-shipboard to the sound
Of trumpets and heart-moving melody,
And gave their rich keel to the restless sea.

Then for four days before the wind they drove,
Until at last in sight a new land hove
Their pilot called the coast of Argolis,
That rich in cattle and in horses is.

But landing there had Perseus' godlike fame
Gone on before him, and the people came
And cried upon him for their king and lord,
The people's saving shield and conquering sword;
So in that land he failed not to abide,
And there with many rites he purified
His fated hands of that unlooked-for guilt:

And there a town within a while he built
Men call Mycenæ. Peaceful grew the land
The while the ivory rod was in his hand,
For robbers fled, and good men still waxed strong,
And in no house was any sound of wrong,
Until the Golden Age seemed there to be,
So steeped the land was in felicity.

Time past, and there his wife and mother died,
And he, no god, must lie down by their side,
While Alceus his first son reigned after him,
A conquering king, and fair, and strong of limb.

But long ere this he did not fail to lay
The sacred things that brought him on his way
Within Minerva's temple; there with awe
'Twixt silver bars, all folk these marvels saw,
But not for long, for on the twentieth day
From the fair temple were they snatched away
Though by the armed priests guarded faithfully.
But still the empty wallet there did lie
Wherein had Perseus borne the head with him,
Which still when his great deeds were waxing dim,
Hung in the Maiden's temple near the shrine,
And folk would pour before it oil and wine.

And know besides, that from that very year
Those who are wise say that the Maid doth bear
Amidst her shield that awful snaky head
Whereby so many heedless ones are dead.

BEFORE the last words of his tale were done
The purple hills had hidden half the sun,
But when the story's death a silence made
Within the hall, in freshness and in shade
The trembling blossoms of the garden lay.
Few words at first the elder men could say,
For thinking how all stories end with this,
Whatever was the midway gain and bliss:
" He died, and in his place was set his son;
He died, and in a few days every one
Went on their way as though he had not been."
Yet with the pictures that their eyes had seen,
As still from point to point that history past,
And round their thoughts its painted veil was cast,
Their hearts were softened,—far away they saw
That other world, that 'neath another law
Had lived and died; when man might hope to see
Some earthly image of Divinity,
And yet not die, but, strengthened by the sight,
Cast fear away, and go from might to might,
Until to godlike life, though short, he came,
Amidst all losses winning hope of fame,
Nor losing joy the while his life should 'dure,
For that at least his valiant strife made sure,
That still in place of dreamy, youthful hope,
With slow decay and certain death could cope.

So mused the Wanderers, and awhile might deem
That world might not be quite an empty dream,
But dim foreshadowings of what yet might come
When they perforce must leave that new-gained home;
Foreshadowings mingled with the images
Of man's misdeeds in greater days than these.

With no harsh words their musing was undone,
The garden birds sang down the setting sun,
A rainy wind from 'twixt the trees arose,
And sang a mournful counterpoint to those;
And, ere the rain amidst the dark could fall,
The minstrel's song was ringing through the hall.

WHEN April-tide was melting into May,
Within a hall that midst the gardens lay
These elders met, and having feasted well,
The time came round the wonted tale to tell.
Then spake a Wanderer: "Sirs, it happed to me,
Long years agone, to cross the narrow sea
That 'twixt us Drontheimers and England lies;
Young was I then, and little thought these eyes
Should see so many lands ere all was done.

"But this land was a fair and fertile one,
As at that time, for April-tide it was,
Even as now; well, sirs, it came to pass
That to this town or that we took our way,
Or in some abbey's guesten-chamber lay,
And many tales we heard, some false, some true,
Of the ill deeds our fathers used to do
Within that land; and still the tale would end,
'Yet did the Saint his Holy House defend;'
Or, 'Sirs, their fury all was nought and vain,
And by our Earl the pirate-king was slain.'
God wot, I laughed full often in my sleeve,
And could have told them stories, by their leave,
With other endings: but I held my tongue.
Let each king's deeds in his own land be sung,
And then will lies stretch far. Besides, these men
Were puffed up with their luck and glory then,

For at that tide, within the land of France,
Unto their piping must all people dance.—
—But let that pass, for Captain Rolf has told
How, on the way, their king he did behold.

" For other tales they told, and one of these
Not all the washing of the troublous seas,
Not all the changeful days whereof ye know,
Has swept from out my memory; even so
Small things far off will be remembered clear
When matters both more weighty, and more near,
Are waxing dim to us. I, who have seen
So many lands, and midst such marvels been,
Clearer than these abodes of outland men,
Can see above the green and unburnt fen
The little houses of an English town,
Cross-timbered, thatched with fen-reeds coarse and brown,
And high o'er these, three gables, great and fair,
That slender rods of columns do upbear
Over the minster doors, and imagery
Of kings, and flowers no summer field doth see,
Wrought on those gables.—Yea, I heard withal,
In the fresh morning air, the trowels fall
Upon the stone, a thin noise far away;
For high up wrought the masons on that day,
Since to the monks that house seemed scarcely well
Till they had set a spire or pinnacle
Each side the great porch. In that burgh I heard

This tale, and late have set down every word
That I remembered, when the thoughts would come,
Of what we did in our deserted home,
And of the days, long past, when we were young,
Nor knew the cloudy woes that o'er us hung.
And howsoever I am now grown old,
Yet is it still the tale I then heard told
Within the guest-house of that minster-close,
Whose walls, like cliffs new-made, before us rose."

THE PROUD KING.

ARGUMENT.

A CERTAIN King, blinded by pride, thought that he was something more than man, if not equal to God; but such a judgment fell on him that none knew him for king, and he suffered many things, till in the end, humbling himself, he regained his kingdom and honour.

IN a far country that I cannot name,
And on a year long ages past away,
A King there dwelt, in rest and ease and fame,
And richer than the Emperor is to-day:
The very thought of what this man might say,
From dusk to dawn kept many a lord awake,
For fear of him did many a great man quake.

Young was he when he first sat on the throne,
And he was wedded to a noble wife,
But at the daïs must he sit alone,
Nor durst a man speak to him for his life,
Except with leave: nought knew he change or strife,
But that the years passed silently away,
And in his black beard gathered specks of grey.

Now so it chanced, upon a May morning,
Wakeful he lay when yet low was the sun,
Looking distraught at many a royal thing,
And counting up his titles one by one,
And thinking much of things that he had done;
For full of life he felt, and hale and strong,
And knew that none durst say when he did wrong.

For no man now could give him dread or doubt,
The land was 'neath his sceptre far and wide,
And at his beck would well-armed myriads shout.
Then swelled his vain, unthinking heart with pride,
Until at last he raised him up and cried,
"What need have I for temple or for priest,
Am I not God, whiles that I live at least."

And yet withal that dead his fathers were,
He needs must think, that quick the years pass by;
But he, who seldom yet had seen death near
Or heard his name, said, "Still I may not die
Though underneath the earth my fathers lie;
My sire indeed was called a mighty king,
Yet in regard of mine, a little thing

"His kingdom was; moreover his grandsire
To him was but a prince of narrow lands,
Whose father, though to things he did aspire
Beyond most men, a great knight of his hands,
Yet ruled some little town where now there stands

The kennel of my dogs; then may not I
Rise higher yet, nor like poor wretches die?

"Since up the ladder ever we have gone
Step after step nor fallen back again;
And there are tales of people who have won
A life enduring, without care or pain,
Or any man to make their wishes vain;
Perchance this prize unwitting now I hold;
For times change fast, the world is waxen old."

So 'mid these thoughts once more he fell asleep,
And when he woke again, high was the sun,
Then quickly from his gold bed did he leap,
And of his former thoughts remembered none,
But said, "To-day through green woods will we run,
Nor shall to-day be worse than yesterday,
But better it may be, for game and play."

So for the hunt was he apparelled,
And forth he rode with heart right well at ease;
And many a strong, deep-chested hound they led,
Over the dewy grass betwixt the trees,
And fair white horses fit for the white knees
Of Her the ancients fabled rides a-nights
Betwixt the setting and the rising lights.

Now following up a mighty hart and swift
The King rode long upon that morning tide,

And since his horse was worth a kingdom's gift,
It chanced him all his servants to outride,
Until unto a shaded river-side
He came alone at hottest of the sun,
When all the freshness of the day was done.

Dismounting there, and seeing so far adown
The red-finned fishes o'er the gravel play,
It seemed that moment worth his royal crown
To hide there from the burning of the day,
Wherefore he did off all his rich array,
And tied his horse unto a neighbouring tree,
And in the water sported leisurely.

But when he was fulfilled of this delight
He gat him to the bank well satisfied,
And thought to do on him his raiment bright
And homeward to his royal house to ride;
But 'mazed and angry, looking far and wide
Nought saw he of his horse and rich attire,
And 'gainst the thief 'gan threaten vengeance dire.

But little help his fury was to him,
So lustily he 'gan to shout and cry;
None answered, still the lazy chub did swim
By inches 'gainst the stream; away did fly
The small pied bird, but nathless stayed anigh,
And o'er the stream still plied his fluttering trade,
Of such a helpless man not much afraid.

Weary of crying in that lonely place
He ceased at last, and thinking what to do,
E'en as he was, up stream he set his face,
Since not far off a certain house he knew
Where dwelt his ranger, a lord leal and true,
Who many a bounty at his hands had had,
And now to do him ease would be right glad.

Thither he hastened on, and as he went
The hot sun sorely burned his naked skin,
The whiles he thought, "When he to me has lent
Fine raiment, and at ease I sit within
His coolest chamber clad in linen thin,
And drinking wine, the best that he has got,
I shall forget this troublous day and hot."

Now note, that while he thus was on his way,
And still his people for their master sought,
There met them one who in the King's array
Bestrode his very horse, and as they thought
Was none but he in good time to them brought,
Therefore they hailed him King, and so all rode
From out the forest to his fair abode.

And there in royal guise he sat at meat,
Served, as his wont was, 'neath the canopy,
And there the hounds fawned round about his feet,
And there that city's elders did he see,
And with his lords took counsel what should be;

And there at supper when the day waxed dim
The Queen within his chamber greeted him.

LEAVE we him there; for to the ranger's gate
The other came, and on the horn he blew,
Till peered the wary porter through the grate
To see if he, perchance, the blower knew,
Before he should the wicket-gate undo;
But when he saw him standing there, he cried,
"What dost thou friend, to show us all thine hide?

"We list not buy to-day or flesh or fell;
Go home and get thyself a shirt at least,
If thou wouldst aught, for saith our vicar well,
That God hath given clothes e'en to the beast."
Therewith he turned to go, but as he ceased
The King cried out, "Open, O foolish man!
I am thy lord and King, Jovinian;

"Go now, and tell thy master I am here
Desiring food and clothes, and in this plight,
And then hereafter need'st thou have no fear,
Because thou didst not know me at first sight."
"Yea, yea, I am but dreaming in the night,"
The carle said, "and I bid thee, friend, to dream,
Come through! here is no gate, it doth but seem."

With that his visage vanished from the grate;
But when the King now found himself alone,
He hurled himself against the mighty gate,
And beat upon it madly with a stone,
Half wondering midst his rage, how any one
Could live, if longed-for things he chanced to lack;
But midst all this, at last the gate flew back,

And there the porter stood, brown-bill in hand,
And said, "Ah, fool, thou makest this ado,
Wishing before my lord's high seat to stand;
Thou shalt be gladder soon hereby to go,
Or surely nought of handy blows I know.
Come, willy nilly, thou shalt tell this tale
Unto my lord, if aught it may avail."

With that his staff he handled, as if he
Would smite the King, and said, "Get on before!
St Mary! now thou goest full leisurely,
Who, erewhile, fain wouldst batter down the door.
See now, if ere this matter is passed o'er,
I come to harm, yet thou shalt not escape,
Thy back is broad enow to pay thy jape."

Half blind with rage the King before him passed,
But nought of all he doomed him to durst say,
Lest he from rest nigh won should yet be cast,
So with a swelling heart he took his way,
Thinking right soon his shame to cast away,

And the carle followed still, ill satisfied
With such a wretched losel to abide.

Fair was the ranger's house and new and white,
And by the King built scarce a year agone,
And carved about for this same lord's delight
With woodland stories deftly wrought in stone;
There oft the King was wont to come alone,
For much he loved this lord, who erst had been
A landless squire, a servant of the Queen.

Now long a lord and clad in rich attire,
In his fair hall he sat before the wine
Watching the evening sun's yet burning fire,
Through the close branches of his pleasance shine,
In that mood when man thinks himself divine,
Remembering not whereto we all must come,
Not thinking aught but of his happy home.

From just outside loud mocking merriment
He heard midst this; and therewithal a squire
Came hurrying up, his laughter scarcely spent,
Who said, "My lord, a man in such attire
As Adam's, ere he took the devil's hire,
Who saith that thou wilt know him for the King,
Up from the gate John Porter needs must bring.

"He to the King is nothing like in aught
But that his beard he weareth in such guise

As doth my lord: wilt thou that he be brought?
Perchance some treason 'neath his madness lies."
"Yea," saith the ranger, "that may well be wise,
But haste, for this eve am I well at ease,
Nor would be wearied with such folk as these."

Then went the squire, and coming back again,
The porter and the naked King brought in,
Who thinking now that this should end his pain,
Forgat his fury and the porter's sin,
And said, "Thou wonderest how I came to win
This raiment, that kings long have ceased to wear,
Since Noah's flood has altered all the air?

"Well, thou shalt know, but first I pray thee, Hugh,
Reach me that cloak that lieth on the board,
For certes, though thy folk are leal and true,
It seemeth that they deem a mighty lord
Is made by crown, and silken robe, and sword;
Lo, such are borel folk; but thou and I
Fail not to know the signs of majesty.

"Thou risest not! thou lookest strange on me!
Ah, what is this? Who reigneth in my stead?
How long hast thou been plotting secretly?
Then slay me now, for if I be not dead
Armies will rise up when I nod my head.
Slay me!—or cast thy treachery away,
And have anew my favour from this day."

"Why should I tell thee that thou ne'er wast king?"
The ranger said, "Thou knowest not what I say;
Poor man, I pray God help thee in this thing,
And, ere thou diest send thee some good day;
Nor hence unholpen shalt thou go away.
Good fellows, this poor creature is but mad,
Take him, and in a coat let him be clad;

"And give him meat and drink, and on this night
Beneath some roof of ours let him abide,
For some day God may set his folly right."
Then spread the King his arms abroad and cried,
"Woe to thy food, thy house, and thee betide,
Thou loathsome traitor! Get ye from the hall,
Lest smitten by God's hand this roof should fall;

"Yea, if the world be but an idle dream,
And God deals nought with it, yet shall ye see
Red flame from out these carven windows stream.
I, I, will burn this vile place utterly,
And strewn with salt the poisonous earth shall be,
That such a wretch of such a man has made,
That so such Judases may grow afraid."

Thus raving, those who held him he shook off
And rushed from out the hall, nigh mad indeed,
And gained the gate, not heeding blow or scoff,
Nor longer of his nakedness took heed,

But ran, he knew not where, at headlong speed.
Till, when at last his strength was fully spent,
Worn out, he fell beneath a woody bent.

But for the ranger, left alone in peace,
He bade his folk bring in the minstrelsy;
And thinking of his life, and fair increase
Of all his goods, a happy man was he,
And towards his master felt right lovingly,
And said, "This luckless madman will avail
When next I see the King for one more tale."

MEANWHILE the real King by the road-side lay,
Panting, confused, scarce knowing if he dreamed,
Until at last, when vanished was the day,
Through the dark night far off a bright light gleamed;
Which growing quickly, down the road there streamed
The glare of torches, held by men who ran
Before the litter of a mighty man.

These mixed with soldiers soon the road did fill,
And on their harness could the King behold
The badge of one erst wont to do his will,
A counsellor, a gatherer-up of gold,
Who underneath his rule had now grown old:

Then wrath and bitterness so filled his heart,
That from his wretched lair he needs must start;

And o'er the clatter shrilly did he cry,
"Well met, Duke Peter! ever art thou wise;
Surely thou wilt not let a day go by
Ere thou art good friends with mine enemies;
O fit to rule within a land of lies,
Go on thy journey, make thyself more meet
To sit in hell beneath the devil's feet!"

But as he ceased a soldier drew anear,
And smote him flatling with his sheathed sword,
And said, "Speak louder, that my lord may hear,
And give thee wages for thy ribald word!
Come forth, for I must show thee to my lord,
For he may think thee more than mad indeed,
Who of men's ways hast taken wondrous heed."

Now was the litter stayed midmost the road,
And round about, the torches in a ring
Were gathered, and their flickering light now glowed
In gold and gems and many a lordly thing,
And showed that face well known unto the King,
That, smiling yesterday, right humble words
Had spoken midst the concourse of the lords.

But now he said, "Man, thou wert cursing me
If these folk heard aright; what wilt thou then,

Deem'st thou that I have done some wrong to thee,
Or hast thou scathe from any of my men?
In any case tell all thy tale again
When on the judgment-seat thou see'st me sit,
And I will give no careless ear to it."

"The night is dark, and in the summer wind
The torches flicker; canst thou see my face?
Bid them draw nigher yet, and call to mind
Who gave thee all thy riches and thy place—
—Well;—if thou canst, deny me, with such grace
As by the fire-light Peter swore of old,
When in that Maundy-week the night was cold—

"—Alas! canst thou not see I am the King?"
So spoke he, as their eyes met mid the blaze,
And the King saw the dread foreshadowing
Within the elder's proud and stony gaze,
Of what those lips, thin with the lapse of days,
Should utter now; nor better it befell;—
"Friend, a strange story thou art pleased to tell;

"Thy luck it is thou tellest it to me,
Who deem thee mad and let thee go thy way:
The King is not a man to pity thee,
Or on thy folly thy fool's tale to lay:
Poor fool! take this, and with the light of day
Buy food and raiment of some labouring clown,
And by my counsel keep thee from the town,

"For fear thy madness break out in some place
Where folk thy body to the judge must hale,
And then indeed wert thou in evil case—
Press on, sirs! or the time will not avail."
—There stood the King, with limbs that 'gan to fail,
Speechless, and holding in his trembling hand
A coin new stamped for people of the land;

Thereon, with sceptre, crown, and royal robe,
The image of a King, himself, was wrought;
His jewelled feet upon a quartered globe,
As though by him all men were vain and nought.
One moment the red glare the silver caught,
As the lord ceased, the next his hurrying folk
The flaring circle round the litter broke.

The next, their shadows barred a patch of light,
Fast vanishing, all else around was black;
And the poor wretch, left lonely with the night,
Muttered, "I wish the day would ne'er come back,
If all that once I had I now must lack:
Ah God! how long is it since I was King,
Nor lacked enough to wish for anything?"

Then down the lonely road he wandered yet,
Following the vanished lights, he scarce knew why,
Till he began his sorrows to forget,
And, steeped in drowsiness, at last drew nigh
A grassy bank, where, worn with misery,

He slept the dreamless sleep of weariness,
That many a time such wretches' eyes will bless.

BUT at the dawn he woke, nor knew at first
What ugly chain of grief had brought him there,
Nor why he felt so wretched and accursed;
At last remembering, the fresh morning air,
The rising sun, and all things fresh and fair,
Yet caused some little hope in him to rise,
That end might come to these new miseries.

So looking round about, he saw that he
To his own city gates was come anear;
Then he arose and going warily,
And hiding now and then for very fear
Of folk who bore their goods and country cheer,
Unto the city's market, at the last
Unto a stone's-throw of the gate he passed.

But when he drew unto the very gate,
Into the throng of country-folk he came
Who for the opening of the door did wait,
Of whom some mocked, and some cried at him shame,
And some would know his country and his name;
But one into his waggon drew him up,
And gave him milk from out a beechen cup,

And asked him of his name and misery;
Then in his throat a swelling passion rose,
Which yet he swallowed down, and, "Friend," said he,
"Last night I had the hap to meet the foes
Of God and man, who robbed me, and with blows
Stripped off my weed and left me on the way:
Thomas the Pilgrim am I called to-day.

"A merchant am I of another town,
And rich enow to pay thee for thy deed,
If at the King's door thou wilt set me down,
For there a squire I know, who at my need
Will give me food and drink, and fitting weed.
What is thy name? in what place dost thou live?
That I some day great gifts to thee may give."

"Fair Sir," the carle said, "I am poor enow,
Though certes food I lack not easily;
My name is Christopher a-Green; I sow
A little orchard set with bush and tree,
And ever there the kind land keepeth me,
For I, now fifty, from a little boy
Have dwelt thereon, and known both grief and joy.

"The house my grandsire built there has grown old,
And certainly a bounteous gift it were
If thou shouldst give me just enough of gold
To build it new; nor shouldst thou lack my prayer
For such a gift." "Nay, friend, have thou no care,"

The King said: "this is but a little thing
To me, who oft am richer than the King."

Now as they talked the gate was opened wide,
And toward the palace went they through the street,
And Christopher walked ever by the side
Of his rough wain, where midst the May-flowers sweet
Jovinian lay, that folk whom they might meet
Might see him not to mock at his bare skin:
So shortly to the King's door did they win.

Then through the open gate Jovinian ran
Of the first court, and no man stayed him there;
But as he reached the second gate, a man
Of the King's household, seeing him all bare
And bloody, cried out, "Whither dost thou fare?
Sure thou art seventy times more mad than mad,
Or else some magic potion thou hast had,

"Whereby thou fear'st not steel or anything."
"But," said the King, "good fellow, I know thee;
And can it be thou knowest not thy King?
Nay, thou shalt have a good reward of me,
That thou wouldst rather have than ten years' fee,
If thou wilt clothe me in fair weed again,
For now to see my council am I fain."

"Out, ribald!" quoth the fellow: "What say'st thou?
Thou art my lord, whom God reward and bless?

Truly before long shalt thou find out how
John Hangman cureth ill folk's wilfulness;
Yea, from his scourge the blood has run for less
Than that which now thou sayest: nay, what say I?
For lighter words have I seen tall men die.

"Come now, the sergeants to this thing shall see!"
So to the guard-room was Jovinian brought,
Where his own soldiers mocked him bitterly,
And all his desperate words they heeded nought;
Until at last there came to him this thought,
That never from this misery should he win,
But, spite of all his struggles, die therein.

And terrible it seemed, that everything
So utterly was changed since yesterday,
That these who were the soldiers of the King,
Ready to lie down in the common way
Before him, nor durst rest if he bade play,
Now stood and mocked him, knowing not the face
At whose command each man there had his place.

"Ah, God!" said he, "is this another earth
From that whereon I stood two days ago?
Or else in sleep have I had second birth?
Or among mocking shadows do I go,
Unchanged myself of flesh and fell, although
My fair weed I have lost and royal gear?
And meanwhile all are changed that I meet here;

" And yet in heart and nowise outwardly."
Amid his wretched thoughts two sergeants came,
Who said, " Hold, sirs ! because the King would see
The man who thus so rashly brings him shame,
By taking his high style and spotless name,
That never has been questioned ere to-day.
Come, fool ! needs is it thou must go our way."

So at the sight of him all men turned round,
As 'twixt these two across the courts he went,
With downcast head and hands together bound ;
While from the windows maid and varlet leant,
And through the morning air fresh laughter sent ;
Until unto the threshold they were come
Of the great hall within that kingly home.

Therewith right fast Jovinian's heart must beat,
As now he thought, " Lo, here shall end the strife ;
For either shall I sit on mine own seat,
Known unto all, soldier and lord and wife,
Or else is this the ending of my life,
And no man henceforth shall remember me,
And a vain name in records shall I be."

Therewith he raised his head up, and beheld
One clad in gold set on his royal throne,
Gold-crowned, whose hand the ivory sceptre held ;
And underneath him sat the Queen alone,
Ringed round with standing lords, of whom not one

Did aught but utmost reverence unto him;
Then did Jovinian shake in every limb.

Yet midst amaze and rage to him it seemed
This man was nowise like him in the face;
But with a marvellous glory his head gleamed,
As though an angel sat in that high place,
Where erst he sat like all his royal race,—
—But their eyes met, and with a stern, calm brow
The shining one cried out, "And where art thou?

"Where art thou, robber of my majesty?"
"Was I not King," he said, "but yesterday?
And though to-day folk give my place to thee,
I am Jovinian; yes, though none gainsay,
If on these very stones thou shouldst me slay,
And though no friend be left for me to moan,
I am Jovinian still, and King alone."

Then said that other, "O thou foolish man,
King was I yesterday, and long before,
Nor is my name aught but Jovinian,
Whom in this house the Queen my mother bore,
Unto my longing father, for right sore
Was I desired before I saw the light;
Thou, fool, art first to speak against my right.

"And surely well thou meritest to die;
Yet ere that I bid lead thee unto death,

Hearken to these my lords that stand anigh,
And what this faithful Queen beside me saith,
Then may'st thou many a year hence draw thy breath,
If these should stammer in their speech one whit:
Behold this face, lords, look ye well on it!

"Thou, O fair Queen, say now whose face is this!"
Then cried they, "Hail O Lord Jovinian
Long mayst thou live!" and the Queen knelt to kiss
His gold-shod feet, and through her face there ran
Sweet colour, as she said, "Thou art the man
By whose side I have lain for many a year,
Thou art my lord Jovinian lief and dear."

Then said he, "O thou wretch, hear now and see!
What thing should hinder me to slay thee now?
And yet indeed, such mercy is in me,
If thou wilt kneel down humbly and avow
Thou art no King, but base-born, as I know
Thou art indeed, in mine house shalt thou live,
And as thy service is, so shalt thou thrive."

But the unhappy King laughed bitterly,
The red blood rose to flush his visage wan
Where erst the grey of death began to be;
"Thou liest," he said, "I am Jovinian,
Come of great Kings; nor am I such a man
As still to live when all delight is gone,
As thou might'st do, who sittest on my throne."

No answer made the other for a while,
But sat and gazed upon him steadfastly,
Until across his face there came a smile,
Where scorn seemed mingled with some great pity.
And then he said, "Nathless thou shalt not die,
But live on as thou mayst, a lowly man
Forgetting thou wast once Jovinian."

Then wildly round the hall Jovinian gazed,
Turning about to many a well-known face,
But none of all his folk seemed grieved or mazed,
But stood unmoved, each in his wonted place;
There were the Lords, the Marshal with his mace,
The Chamberlain, the Captain of the Guard,
Grey-headed, with his wrinkled face and hard,

That had peered down so many a lane of war;
There stood the grave ambassadors arow,
Come from half-conquered lands; without the bar
The foreign merchants gazed upon the show,
Willing new things of that great land to know;
Nor was there any doubt in any man
That the gold throne still held Jovinian.

Yea, as the sergeants laid their hands on him,
The mighty hound that crouched before the throne,
Flew at him fain to tear him limb from limb,
Though in the woods, the brown bear's dying groan,
He and that beast had often heard alone.

"Ah!" muttered he, "take thou thy wages too
Worship the risen sun as these men do."

They thrust him out, and as he passed the door,
The murmur of the stately court he heard
Behind him, and soft footfalls on the floor,
And, though by this somewhat his skin was seared,
Hung back at the rough eager wind afeard;
But from the place they dragged him through the gate,
Wherethrough he oft had rid in royal state.

Then down the streets they led him, where of old,
He, coming back from some well-finished war,
Had seen the line of flashing steel and gold
Wind upwards 'twixt the houses from the bar,
While clashed the bells from wreathed spires afar;
Now moaning, as they haled him on, he said,
"God and the world against one lonely head!"

BUT soon, the bar being past they loosed their hold,
And said "Thus saith by us our Lord the King,
Dwell now in peace, but yet be not so bold
To come again, or to thy lies to cling,
Lest unto thee there fall a worser thing;
And for ourselves we bid thee ever pray
For him who has been good to thee this day."

Therewith they turned away into the town,
And still he wandered on and knew not where,
Till, stumbling at the last, he fell adown,
And looking round beheld a brook right fair,
That ran in pools and shallows here and there,
And on the further side of it a wood,
Nigh which a lowly clay-built hovel stood.

Gazing thereat, it came into his mind
A priest dwelt there, a hermit wise and old,
Whom he had ridden oftentimes to find,
In days when first the sceptre he did hold,
And unto whom his mind he oft had told,
And had good counsel from him, though indeed
A scanty crop had sprung from that good seed.

Therefore he passed the brook with heavy cheer,
And toward the little house went speedily,
And at the door knocked, trembling with his fear,
Because he thought, "Will he remember me?
If not, within me must there surely be
Some devil who turns everything to ill,
And makes my wretched body do his will."

So, while such doleful things as this he thought,
There came unto the door the holy man,
Who said, "Good friend, what tidings hast thou brought?"
"Father," he said, "knowest thou Jovinian?

Knowst thou me not, made naked, poor, and wan?
Alas, O father! am I not the King,
The rightful lord of thee and everything?"

"Nay, thou art mad to tell me such a tale!"
The hermit said; "if thou seek'st soul's health here,
Right little will such words as this avail;
It were a better deed to shrive thee clear,
And take the pardon Christ has bought so dear,
Than to an ancient man such mocks to say
That would be fitter for a Christmas play."

So to his hut he got him back again,
And fell the unhappy King upon his knees,
And unto God at last he did complain,
Saying, "Lord God, what bitter things are these?
What hast thou done, that every man that sees
This wretched body, of my death is fain?
O Lord God, give me back myself again!

"E'en if therewith I needs must die straightway,
Indeed I know that since upon the earth
I first did go, I ever day by day
Have grown the worse, who was of little worth
E'en at the best time since my helpless birth.
And yet it pleased thee once to make me King,
Why hast thou made me now this wretched thing?

"Why am I hated so of every one?

Wilt thou not let me live my life again,
Forgetting all the deeds that I have done,
Forgetting my old name, and honours vain,
That I may cast away this lonely pain?
Yet if thou wilt not, help me in this strife,
That I may pass my little span of life,

"Not made a monster by unhappiness.
What shall I say? thou mad'st me weak of will,
Thou wrapped'st me in ease and carelessness,
And yet, as some folk say, thou lovest me still;
Look down, of folly I have had my fill,
And am but now as first thou madest me,
Weak, yielding clay to take impress of thee."

So said he weeping, and but scarce had done,
When yet again came forth that hermit old,
And said, "Alas! my master and my son,
Is this a dream my wearied eyes behold?
What doleful wonder now shall I be told,
Of that ill world that I so long have left?
What thing thy glory from thee has bereft?"

A strange surprise of joy therewith there came
To that worn heart; he said, "For some great sin
The Lord my God has brought me unto shame;
I am unknown of servants, wife, and kin,
Unknown of all the lords that stand within
My father's house; nor didst thou know me more

When e'en just now I stood before thy door.

"Now since thou know'st me, surely God is good,
And will not slay me, and good hope I have
Of help from Him that died upon the rood,
And is a mighty lord to slay and save:
So now again these blind men will I brave,
If thou wilt give me of thy poorest weed,
And some rough food, the which I sorely need;

"Then of my sins thou straight shalt shrive me clean."
Then weeping said the holy man, "Dear lord,
What heap of woes upon thine head has been;
Enter, O King, take this rough gown and cord,
And scanty food, my hovel can afford;
And tell me everything thou hast to say;
And then the High God speed thee on thy way."

So when in coarse serge raiment he was clad,
He told him all his pride had made him think;
And showed him of his life both good and bad;
And then being houselled, did he eat and drink,
While in the wise man's heart his words did sink,
For, "God be praised!" he thought, "I am no king,
Who scarcely shall do right in anything!"

Then he made ready for the King his ass,
And bade again, God speed him on the way,

And down the road the King made haste to pass
As it was growing toward the end of day,
With sober joy for troubles passed away;
But trembling still, as onward he did ride,
Meeting few folk upon that even-tide.

SO to the city gate being come at last,
He noted there two ancient warders stand,
Whereof one looked askance as he went past,
And whispered low behind his held-up hand
Unto his mate, "The King, who gave command
That if disguised he passed this gate to-day,
No reverence we should do him on the way."

Thereat with joy, Jovinian smiled again,
And so passed onward quickly down the street;
And well nigh was he eased of all his pain
When he beheld the folk that he might meet
Gaze hard at him, as though they fain would greet
His well-known face, but durst not, knowing well
He would not any of his state should tell.

Withal unto the palace being come,
He lighted down thereby and entered,
And once again it seemed his royal home,
For folk again before him bowed the head;

And to him came a Squire, who softly said,
"The Queen awaits thee, O my lord the King,
Within the little hall where minstrels sing,

"Since there thou badst her meet thee on this night."
"Lead on then!" said the King, and in his heart
He said, "perfay all goeth more than right
And I am King again;" but with a start
He thought of him who played the kingly part
That morn, yet said, "if God will have it so
This man like all the rest my face will know."

So in the Little Hall the Queen he found,
Asleep, as one a spell binds suddenly;
For her fair broidery lay upon the ground,
And in her lap her open hand did lie,
The silken-threaded needle close thereby;
And by her stood that image of the King
In rich apparel, crown and signet-ring.

But when the King stepped forth with angry eye
And would have spoken, came a sudden light,
And changed was that other utterly;
For he was clad in robe of shining white,
Inwrought with flowers of unnamed colours bright,
Girt with a marvellous girdle, and whose hem
Fell to his naked feet and shone in them;

And from his shoulders did two wings arise,

That with the swaying of his body, played
This way and that; of strange and lovely dyes
Their feathers were, and wonderfully made:
And now he spoke, "O King, be not dismayed,
Or think my coming here so strange to be,
For oft ere this have I been close to thee.

"And now thou knowest in how short a space
The God that made the world can unmake thee,
And though He alter in no whit thy face,
Can make all folk forget thee utterly,
That thou to-day a nameless wretch mayst be,
Who yesterday woke up without a peer,
The wide world's marvel and the people's fear.

"Behold, thou oughtest to thank God for this,
That on the hither side of thy dark grave
Thou well hast learned how great a God He is,
Who from the heavens countless rebels drave,
Yet turns himself such folk as thee to save;
For many a man thinks nought at all of it,
Till in a darksome land he comes to sit,

"Lamenting everything: so do not thou!
For inasmuch as thou thoughtst not to die
This thing may happen to thee even now,
Because the day unspeakable draws nigh,
When bathed in unknown flame all things shall lie;
And if thou art upon God's side that day,
Unslain, thine earthly part shall pass away.

"Or if thy body in the grave must rot,
Well mayst thou see how small a thing is this,
Whose pain of yesterday now hurts thee not,
Now thou hast come again to earthly bliss,
Though bitter-sweet thou knowest well this is,
And though no coming day can ever see
Ending of happiness where thou mayst be.

"Now must I go, nor wilt thou see me more,
Until the day, when, unto thee at least,
This world is gone, and an unmeasured shore,
Where all is wonderful and changed, thou seest:
Therefore, farewell! at council and at feast
Thy nobles shalt thou meet as thou hast done,
Nor wilt thou more be strange to any one."

So scarce had he done speaking, ere his wings
Within the doorway of the hall did gleam,
And then he vanished quite; and all these things
Unto Jovinian little more did seem
Than some distinct and well-remembered dream,
From which one wakes amidst a feverish night,
Taking the moonshine for the morning light.

Silent he stood, not moving for a while,
Pondering o'er all these wondrous things, until
The Queen arose from sleep, and with a smile,
Said, "O fair lord, your great men by your will
E'en as I speak the banquet-chamber fill,

To greet thee amidst joy and revelling,
Wilt thou not therefore meet them as a King?"

So from that place of marvels having gone,
Half mazed, he soon was clad in rich array,
And sat thereafter on his kingly throne,
As though no other had sat there that day;
Nor did a soul of all his household say
A word about the man, who on that morn
Had stood there, naked, helpless, and forlorn.

But ever day by day the thought of it
Within Jovinian's heart the clearer grew,
As o'er his head the ceaseless time did flit,
And everything still towards its ending drew,
New things becoming old, and old things new;
Till, when a moment of eternity
Had passed, grey-headed did Jovinian lie

One sweet May morning, wakeful in his bed;
And thought, "That day is thirty years a-gone
Since useless folly came into my head,
Whereby, before the steps of mine own throne,
I stood in helpless agony alone,
And of the wondrous things that there befell,
When I am gone there will be none to tell:

"No man is now alive who thinks that he,
Who bade thrust out the madman on that tide,

Was other than the King they used to see:
Long years have passed now, since the hermit died,
So must I tell the tale, ere by his side
I lie, lest it be unrecorded quite,
Like a forgotten dream in morning light.

"Yea, lest I die ere night come, this same day
Unto some scribe will I tell everything,
That it may lie when I am gone away,
Stored up within the archives of the King;
And may God grant the words thereof may ring
Like His own voice in the next comer's ears!
Whereby his folk shall shed the fewer tears."

So it was done, and at the King's command
A clerk that day did note it every whit,
And after by a man of skilful hand
In golden letters fairly was it writ;
Yet little heed the new King took of it
That filled the throne when King Jovinian died,
So much did all things feed his swelling pride.

But whether God chastised him in his turn,
And he grew wise thereafter, I know not;
I think by eld alone he came to learn
How lowly on some day must be his lot.
But ye, O Kings, think all that ye have got
To be but gawds cast out upon some heap,
And stolen the while the Master was asleep.

THE story done, for want of happier things,
Some men must even fall to talk of kings;
Some trouble of a far-off Grecian isle,
Some hard Sicilian craftsman's cruel guile
Whereby he raised himself to be as God,
Till good men slew him; the fell Persian rod
As blighting as the deadly pestilence,
The brazen net of armed men from whence
Was no escape; The fir-built Norway hall
Filled with the bonders waiting for the fall
Of the great roof whereto the torch is set;
The laughing mouth, beneath the eyes still wet
With more than sea-spray, as the well-loved land
The freeman still looks back on, while his hand
Clutches the tiller, and the eastern breeze
Grows fresh and fresher: many things like these
They talked about, till they seemed young again,
Remembering what a glory and a gain
Their fathers deemed the death of kings to be.
And yet amidst it, some smiled doubtfully
For thinking how few men escape the yoke,
From this or that man's hand, and how most folk
Must needs be kings and slaves the while they live,
And take from this man, and to that man give
Things hard enow. Yet as they mused, again
The minstrels raised some high heroic strain
That led men on to battle in old times;
And midst the glory of its mingling rhymes,
Their hard hearts softened, and strange thoughts arose
Of some new end to all life's cruel foes.

MAY.

O LOVE, this morn when the sweet nightingale
Had so long finished all he had to say,
That thou hadst slept, and sleep had told his tale;
And midst a peaceful dream had stolen away
In fragrant dawning of the first of May,
Didst thou see aught? didst thou hear voices sing
Ere to the risen sun the bells 'gan ring?

For then methought the Lord of Love went by
To take possession of his flowery throne,
Ringed round with maids, and youths, and minstrelsy;
A little while I sighed to find him gone,
A little while the dawning was alone,
And the light gathered; then I held my breath,
And shuddered at the sight of Eld and Death.

Alas! Love passed me in the twilight dun,
His music hushed the wakening ousel's song;
But on these twain shone out the golden sun,
And o'er their heads the brown bird's tune was strong,
As shivering, twixt the trees they stole along;
None noted aught their noiseless passing by,
The world had quite forgotten it must die.

NOW must these men be glad a little while
That they had lived to see May once more smile
Upon the earth; wherefore, as men who know
How fast the bad days and the good days go,
They gathered at the feast: the fair abode
Wherein they sat, o'erlooked, across the road
Unhedged green meads, which willowy streams passed through,
And on that morn, before the fresh May dew
Had dried upon the sunniest spot of grass,
From bush to bush did youths and maidens pass
In raiment meet for May apparelled,
Gathering the milk-white blossoms and the red;
And now, with noon long past, and that bright day
Growing aweary, on the sunny way
They wandered, crowned with flowers, and loitering,
And weary, yet were fresh enough to sing
The carols of the morn, and pensive, still
Had cast away their doubt of death and ill,
And flushed with love, no more grew red with shame.

So to the elders as they sat, there came,
With scent of flowers, the murmur of that folk
Wherethrough from time to time a song outbroke,
Till scarce they thought about the story due;

Yet, when anigh to sunsetting it grew,
A book upon the board an elder laid,
And turning from the open window said,
"Too fair a tale the lovely time doth ask,
For this of mine to be an easy task,
Yet in what words soever this is writ,
As for the matter, I dare say of it
That it is lovely as the lovely May;
Pass then the manner, since the learned say
No written record was there of the tale,
Ere we from our fair land of Greece set sail;
How this may be I know not, this I know
That such-like tales the wind would seem to blow
From place to place, e'en as the feathery seed
Is borne across the sea to help the need
Of barren isles; so, sirs, from seed thus sown,
This flower, a gift from other lands has grown.

THE

STORY OF CUPID AND PSYCHE.

ARGUMENT.

PSYCHE, a king's daughter, by her exceeding beauty caused the people to forget Venus; therefore the goddess would fain have destroyed her: nevertheless she became the bride of Love, yet in an unhappy moment lost him by her own fault, and wandering through the world suffered many evils at the hands of Venus, for whom she must accomplish fearful tasks. But the gods and all nature helped her, and in process of time she was reunited to Love, forgiven by Venus, and made immortal by the Father of gods and men.

IN the Greek land of old there was a King
Happy in battle, rich in everything;
Most rich in this, that he a daughter had
Whose beauty made the longing city glad.
She was so fair, that strangers from the sea
Just landed, in the temples thought that she
Was Venus visible to mortal eyes,
New come from Cyprus for a world's surprise.
She was so beautiful that had she stood
On windy Ida by the oaken wood,

And bared her limbs to that bold shepherd's gaze,
Troy might have stood till now with happy days;
And those three fairest, all have gone away
And left her with the apple on that day.

And Psyche is her name in stories old,
As ever by our fathers we were told.

All this beheld Queen Venus from her throne,
And felt that she no longer was alone
In beauty, but, if only for a while,
This maiden matched her god-enticing smile;
Therefore, she wrought in such a wise, that she,
If honoured as a goddess, certainly
Was dreaded as a goddess none the less,
And midst her wealth, dwelt long in loneliness.
Two sisters had she, and men deemed them fair,
But as King's daughters might be anywhere,
And these to men of name and great estate
Were wedded, while at home must Psyche wait.
The sons of kings before her silver feet
Still bowed, and sighed for her; in measures sweet
The minstrels to the people sung her praise,
Yet must she live a virgin all her days.

So to Apollo's fane her father sent,
Seeking to know the dreadful Gods' intent,
And therewith sent he goodly gifts of price
A silken veil, wrought with a paradise,

Three golden bowls, set round with many a gem,
Three silver robes, with gold in every hem,
And a fair ivory image of the god
That underfoot a golden serpent trod;
And when three lords with these were gone away,
Nor could return until the fortieth day,
Ill was the King at ease, and neither took
Joy in the chase, or in the pictured book
The skilled Athenian limner had just wrought,
Nor in the golden cloths from India brought.
At last the day came for those lords' return,
And then twixt hope and fear the king did burn,
As on his throne with great pomp he was set,
And by him Psyche, knowing not as yet
Why they had gone: thus waiting, at noontide
They in the palace heard a voice outside,
And soon the messengers came hurrying,
And with pale faces knelt before the King,
And rent their clothes, and each man on his head
Cast dust, the while a trembling courtier read
This scroll, wherein the fearful answer lay,
Whereat from every face joy passed away.

THE ORACLE.

O FATHER of a most unhappy maid,
O King, whom all the world henceforth shall know
As wretched among wretches, be afraid

To ask the gods thy misery to show,
But if thou needs must hear it, to thy woe
Take back thy gifts to feast thine eyes upon,
When thine own flesh and blood some beast hath won.

"For hear thy doom, a rugged rock there is
Set back a league from thine own palace fair,
There leave the maid, that she may wait the kiss
Of the fell monster that doth harbour there:
This is the mate for whom her yellow hair
And tender limbs have been so fashioned,
This is the pillow for her lovely head.

"O what an evil from thy loins shall spring,
For all the world this monster overturns,
He is the bane of every mortal thing,
And this world ruined, still for more he yearns;
A fire there goeth from his mouth that burns
Worse than the flame of Phlegethon the red—
To such a monster shall thy maid be wed.

"And if thou sparest now to do this thing,
I will destroy thee and thy land also,
And of dead corpses shalt thou be the King,
And stumbling through the dark land shalt thou go,
Howling for second death to end thy woe;
Live therefore as thou mayst and do my will,
And be a King that men may envy still."

What man was there, whose face changed not for grief
At hearing this? Psyche, shrunk like the leaf
The autumn frost first touches on the tree,
Stared round about with eyes that could not see,
And muttered sounds from lips that said no word,
And still within her ears the sentence heard
When all was said and silence fell on all
'Twixt marble columns and adorned wall.

Then spoke the King, bowed down with misery.
"What help is there! O daughter, let us die,
Or else together fleeing from this land,
From town to town go wandering hand in hand;
Thou and I, daughter, till all men forget
That ever on a throne I have been set,
And then, when houseless and disconsolate,
We ask an alms before some city gate,
The gods perchance a little gift may give,
And suffer thee and me like beasts to live."

Then answered Psyche, through her bitter tears,
"Alas! my father, I have known these years
That with some woe the gods have dowered me,
And weighed 'gainst riches infelicity;
Ill is it then against the gods to strive;
Live on, O father, those that are alive
May still be happy; would it profit me
To live awhile, and ere I died to see
Thee perish, and all folk who love me well,
And then at last be dragged myself to hell
Cursed of all men? nay, since all must die,

And I have dreamed not of eternity,
Why weepest thou that I must die to-day?
Why weepest thou? cast thought of shame away,
The dead are not ashamed, they feel no pain;
I have heard folk who spoke of death as gain—
And yet—ah, God, if I had been some maid,
Toiling all day, and in the night-time laid
Asleep on rushes—had I only died
Before this sweet life I had fully tried,
Upon that day when for my birth men sung,
And o'er the feasting folk the sweet bells rung."

And therewith she arose and gat away,
And in her chamber, mourning long she lay,
Thinking of all the days that might have been,
And how that she was born to be a queen,
The prize of some great conqueror of renown,
The joy of many a country and fair town,
The high desire of every prince and lord,
One who could fright with careless smile or word
The hearts of heroes fearless in the war,
The glory of the world, the leading-star
Unto all honour and all earthly fame—
—Round goes the wheel, and death and deadly shame
Shall be her lot, while yet of her men sing
Unwitting that the gods have done this thing.
Long time she lay there, while the sunbeams moved
Over her body through the flowers she loved;
And in the eaves the sparrows chirped outside,

Until for weariness she grew dry-eyed,
And into an unhappy sleep she fell.

But of the luckless King now must we tell,
Who sat devising means to 'scape that shame,
Until the frightened people thronging came
About the palace, and drove back the guards,
Making their way past all the gates and wards;
And, putting chamberlains and marshals by,
Surged round the very throne tumultuously.
Then knew the wretched King all folk had heard
The miserable sentence, and the word
The gods had spoken; and from out his seat
He rose, and spoke in humble words, unmeet
For a great King, and prayed them give him grace,
While twixt his words the tears ran down his face
On to his raiment stiff with golden thread.
But little heeded they the words he said,
For very fear had made them pitiless;
Nor cared they for the maid and her distress,
But clashed their spears together and 'gan cry:
"For one man's daughter shall the people die,
And this fair land become an empty name,
Because thou art afraid to meet the shame
Wherewith the gods reward thy hidden sin?
Nay, by their glory do us right herein!"
"Ye are in haste to have a poor maid slain,"
The King said; "but my will herein is vain,
For ye are many, I one aged man:

Let one man speak, if for his shame he can."

Then stepped a sturdy dyer forth, who said,—
"Fear of the gods brings no shame, by my head.
Listen; thy daughter we would have thee leave
Upon the fated mountain this same eve;
And thither must she go right well arrayed
In marriage raiment, loose hair as a maid,
And saffron veil, and with her shall there go
Fair maidens bearing torches, two and two;
And minstrels, in such raiment as is meet
The god-ordained fearful spouse to greet.
So shalt thou save our wives and little ones,
And something better than a heap of stones,
Dwelt in by noisome things, this town shall be,
And thou thyself shalt keep thy sovereignty;
But if thou wilt not do the thing I say,
Then shalt thou live in bonds from this same day,
And we will bear thy maid unto the hill,
And from the dread gods save the city still."

Then loud they shouted at the words he said,
And round the head of the unhappy maid,
Dreaming uneasily of long-past joys,
Floated the echo of that dreadful noise,
And changed her dreams to dreams of misery.
But when the King knew that the thing must be,
And that no help there was in this distress,
He bade them have all things in readiness
To take the maiden out at sun-setting,
And wed her to the unknown dreadful thing.

So through the palace passed with heavy cheer
Her women gathering the sad wedding gear;
Who lingering long, yet at the last must go,
To waken Psyche to her bitter woe.
So coming to her bower, they found her there,
From head to foot rolled in her yellow hair,
As in the saffron veil she should be soon
Betwixt the setting sun and rising moon;
But when above her a pale maiden bent
And touched her, from her heart a sigh she sent,
And waking, on their woeful faces stared,
Sitting upright, with one white shoulder bared
By writhing on the bed in wretchedness.
Then suddenly remembering her distress,
She bowed her head and 'gan to weep and wail,
But let them wrap her in the bridal veil,
And bind the sandals to her silver feet,
And set the rose-wreath on her tresses sweet;
But spoke no word, yea, rather, wearily
Turned from the yearning face and pitying eye
Of any maid who seemed about to speak.

Now through the garden trees the sun 'gan break,
And that inevitable time drew near;
Then through the courts, grown cruel, strange, and drear,
Since the bright morn, they led her to the gate,
Where she beheld a golden litter wait.
Whereby the King stood, aged and bent to earth,
The flute-players with faces void of mirth,
The down-cast bearers of the ivory wands,

The maiden torch-bearers' unhappy bands.

So then was Psyche taken to the hill,
And through the town the streets were void and still;
For in their houses all the people stayed,
Of that most mournful music sore afraid.
But on the way a marvel did they see,
For, passing by, where wrought of ivory,
There stood the Goddess of the flowery isle,
All folk could see the carven image smile.
But when anigh the hill's bare top they came,
Where Psyche must be left to meet her shame,
They set the litter down, and drew aside
The golden curtains from the wretched bride,
Who at their bidding rose and with them went
Afoot amidst her maids with head down-bent,
Until they came unto the drear rock's brow;
And there she stood apart, not weeping now,
But pale as privet blossom is in June.
There as the quivering flutes left off their tune,
In trembling arms the weeping, haggard King
Caught Psyche, who, like some half-lifeless thing,
Took all his kisses, and no word could say,
Until at last perforce he turned away;
Because the longest agony has end,
And homeward through the twilight did they wend.

But Psyche, now faint and bewildered,
Remembered little of her pain and dread;

Her doom drawn nigh took all her fear away,
And left her faint and weary; as they say
It haps to one who 'neath a lion lies,
Who stunned and helpless feels not ere he dies
The horror of the yellow fell, the red
Hot mouth, and white teeth gleaming o'er his head;
So Psyche felt, as sinking on the ground
She cast one weary vacant look around,
And at the ending of that wretched day
Swooning beneath the risen moon she lay.

NOW backward must our story go awhile
And unto Cyprus the fair flowery isle,
Where hid away from every worshipper
Was Venus sitting, and her son by her
Standing to mark what words she had to say,
While in his dreadful wings the wind did play:
Frowning she spoke, in plucking from her thigh
The fragrant flowers that clasped it lovingly.

"In such a town, O son, a maid there is
Whom any amorous man this day would kiss
As gladly as a goddess like to me,
And though I know an end to this must be,
When white and red and gold are waxen grey
Down on the earth, while unto me one day
Is as another; yet behold, my son,

And go through all my temples one by one
And look what incense rises unto me;
Hearken the talk of sailors from the sea
Just landed, ever will it be the same,
'Hast thou then seen her?'—Yea, unto my shame
Within the temple that is called mine,
As through the veil I watched the altar shine
This happed; a man with outstretched hand there stood,
Glittering in arms, of smiling joyous mood,
With crisp, black hair, and such a face one sees
But seldom now, and limbs like Hercules;
But as he stood there in my holy place,
Across mine image came the maiden's face,
And when he saw her, straight the warrior said
Turning about unto an earthly maid,
'O, lady Venus, thou art kind to me
After so much of wandering on the sea
To show thy very body to me here,'
But when this impious saying I did hear,
I sent them a great portent, for straightway
I quenched the fire, and no priest on that day
Could light it any more for all his prayer.
"So must she fall, so must her golden hair
Flash no more through the city, or her feet
Be seen like lilies moving down the street;
No more must men watch her soft raiment cling
About her limbs, no more must minstrels sing
The praises of her arms and hidden breast.

And thou it is, my son, must give me rest
From all this worship wearisomely paid
Unto a mortal who should be afraid
To match the gods in beauty; take thy bow
And dreadful arrows, and about her sow
The seeds of folly, and with such an one
I pray thee cause her mingle, fair my son,
That not the poorest peasant girl in Greece
Would look on for the gift of Jason's fleece.
Do this, and see thy mother glad again,
And free from insult, in her temples reign
Over the hearts of lovers in the spring."

"Mother," he said, "thou askest no great thing,
Some wretch too bad for death I soon shall find,
Who round her perfect neck his arms shall wind.
She shall be driven from the palace gate
Where once her crowd of worshippers would wait
From earliest morning till the dew was dry
On chance of seeing her gold gown glancing by;
There through the storm of curses shall she go
In evil raiment midst the winter snow,
Or in the summer in rough sheepskins clad.
And thus, O mother, shall I make thee glad
Remembering all the honour thou hast brought
Unto mine altars; since as thine own thought
My thought is grown, my mind as thy dear mind."

Then straight he rose from earth and down the wind

Went glittering 'twixt the blue sky and the sea,
And so unto the place came presently
Where Psyche dwelt, and through the gardens fair
Passed seeking her, and as he wandered there
Had still no thought but to do all her will,
Nor cared to think if it were good or ill:
So beautiful and pitiless he went,
And toward him still the blossomed fruit-trees leant,
And after him the wind crept murmuring,
And on the boughs the birds forgot to sing.

Withal at last amidst a fair green close,
Hedged round about with woodbine and red rose,
Within the flicker of a white-thorn shade
In gentle sleep he found the maiden laid;
One hand that held a book had fallen away
Across her body, and the other lay
Upon a marble fountain's plashing rim,
Among whose broken waves the fish showed dim,
But yet its wide-flung spray now woke her not,
Because the summer day at noon was hot,
And all sweet sounds and scents were lulling her.
So soon the rustle of his wings 'gan stir
Her looser folds of raiment, and the hair
Spread wide upon the grass and daisies fair,
As Love cast down his eyes with a half smile
Godlike and cruel; that faded in a while,
And long he stood above her hidden eyes
With red lips parted in a god's surprise.

Then very Love knelt down beside the maid
And on her breast a hand unfelt he laid,
And drew the gown from off her little feet,
And set his fair cheek to her shoulder sweet,
And kissed her lips that knew of no love yet,
And wondered if his heart would e'er forget
The perfect arm that o'er her body lay.

But now by chance a damsel came that way,
One of her ladies, and saw not the god,
Yet on his shafts cast down had well-nigh trod
In wakening Psyche, who rose up in haste
And girded up her gown about her waist,
And with that maid went drowsily away.

From place to place Love followed her that day
And ever fairer to his eyes she grew,
So that at last when from her bower he flew,
And underneath his feet the moonlit sea
Went shepherding his waves disorderly,
He swore that of all gods and men, no one
Should hold her in his arms but he alone;
That she should dwell with him in glorious wise
Like to a goddess in some paradise;
Yea, he would get from Father Jove this grace
That she should never die, but her sweet face
And wonderful fair body should endure
Till the foundations of the mountains sure
Were molten in the sea; so utterly

Did he forget his mother's cruelty.

And now that he might come to this fair end,
He found Apollo, and besought him lend
His throne of divination for a while,
Whereby he did the priestess so beguile,
She gave the cruel answer ye have heard
Unto those lords, who wrote it word by word,
And back unto the King its threatenings bore,
Whereof there came that grief and mourning sore,
Of which ye wot; thereby is Psyche laid
Upon the mountain-top; thereby, afraid
Of some ill yet, within the city fair
Cower down the people that have sent her there.

Withal did Love call unto him the Wind
Called Zephyrus, who most was to his mind,
And said, "O rainy wooer of the spring,
I pray thee, do for me an easy thing;
To such a hill-top go, O gentle wind,
And there a sleeping maiden shalt thou find;
Her perfect body in thy arms with care
Take up, and unto the green valley bear
That lies before my noble house of gold;
There leave her lying on the daisies cold."
Then, smiling, toward the place the fair Wind went,
And 'neath his wing the sleeping lilies bent,
And flying 'twixt the green earth and the sea
Made the huge anchored ships dance merrily,

And swung round from the east the gilded vanes
On many a palace, and from unhorsed wains
Twitched off the wheat-straw in his hurried flight;
But ere much time had passed he came in sight
Of Psyche laid in swoon upon the hill,
And smiling, set himself to do Love's will;
For in his arms he took her up with care,
Wondering to see a mortal made so fair,
And came into the vale in little space,
And set her down in the most flowery place;
And then unto the plains of Thessaly
Went ruffling up the edges of the sea.

Now underneath the world the moon was gone,
But brighter shone the stars so left alone,
Until a faint green light began to show
Far in the east, whereby did all men know,
Who lay awake either with joy or pain,
That day was coming on their heads again;
Then widening, soon it spread to grey twilight,
And in a while with gold the east was bright;
The birds burst out a-singing one by one,
And o'er the hill-top rose the mighty sun.

Therewith did Psyche open wide her eyes,
And rising on her arm, with great surprise
Gazed on the flowers wherein so deep she lay,
And wondered why upon that dawn of day
Out in the fields she had lift up her head
Rather than in her balmy gold-hung bed.

Then, suddenly remembering all her woes,
She sprang upon her feet, and yet arose
Within her heart a mingled hope and dread
Of some new thing: and now she raised her head,
And gazing round about her timidly,
A lovely grassy valley could she see,
That steep grey cliffs upon three sides did bound,
And under these, a river sweeping round,
With gleaming curves the valley did embrace,
And seemed to make an island of that place;
And all about were dotted leafy trees,
The elm for shade, the linden for the bees,
The noble oak, long ready for the steel
That in that place it had no fear to feel;
The pomegranate, the apple, and the pear,
That fruit and flowers at once made shift to bear,
Nor yet decayed therefore, and in them hung
Bright birds that elsewhere sing not, but here sung
As sweetly as the small brown nightingales
Within the wooded, deep Laconian vales.
But right across the vale, from side to side,
A high white wall all further view did hide,
But that above it, vane and pinnacle
Rose up, of some great house beyond to tell,
And still betwixt these, mountains far away
Against the sky rose shadowy, cold, and grey.

She, standing in the yellow morning sun,
Could scarcely think her happy life was done,

Or that the place was made for misery;
Yea, some lone heaven it rather seemed to be,
Which for the coming band of gods did wait;
Hope touched her heart; no longer desolate,
Deserted of all creatures did she feel,
And o'er her face sweet colour 'gan to steal,
That deepened to a flush, as wandering thought
Desires before unknown unto her brought,
So mighty was the God, though far away.
But trembling midst her hope, she took her way
Unto a little door midmost the wall,
And still on odorous flowers her feet did fall,
And round about her did the strange birds sing,
Praising her beauty in their carolling.
Thus coming to the door, when now her hand
First touched the lock, in doubt she needs must stand,
And to herself she said, "Lo, now the trap!
And yet, alas! whatever now may hap,
How can I 'scape the ill which waiteth me?
Let me die now!" and herewith, tremblingly,
She raised the latch, and her sweet sinless eyes
Beheld a garden like a Paradise,
Void of mankind, fairer than words can say,
Wherein did joyous harmless creatures play
After their kind, and all amidst the trees
Were strange-wrought founts and wondrous images;
And glimmering 'twixt the boughs could she behold
A house made beautiful with beaten gold,
Whose open doors in the bright sun did gleam;

Lonely, but not deserted did it seem.
Long time she stood debating what to do,
But at the last she passed the wicket through,
Which, shutting clamorously behind her, sent
A pang of fear throughout her as she went;
But when through all that green place she had passed,
And by the palace porch she stood at last,
And saw how wonderfully the wall was wrought,
With curious stones from far-off countries brought,
And many an image and fair history
Of what the world has been, and yet shall be,
And all set round with golden craftsmanship,
Well-wrought as some renowned cup's royal lip,
She had a thought again to turn aside:
And yet again, not knowing where to bide,
She entered softly, and with trembling hands
Holding her gown; the wonder of all lands
Met there the wonders of the land and sea.

Now went she through the chambers tremblingly,
And oft in going would she pause and stand,
And drop the gathered raiment from her hand,
Stilling the beating of her heart for fear
As voices whispering low she seemed to hear,
But then again the wind it seemed to be
Moving the golden hangings doubtfully,
Or some bewildered swallow passing close
Unto the pane, or some wind-beaten rose.
Soon seeing that no evil thing came near,

A little she began to lose her fear,
And gaze upon the wonders of the place,
And in the silver mirrors saw her face
Grown strange to her amidst that loneliness,
And stooped to feel the web her feet did press,
Wrought by the brown slim-fingered Indian's toil
Amidst the years of war and vain turmoil;
Or she the figures of the hangings felt,
Or daintily the unknown blossoms smelt,
Or stood and pondered what new thing might mean
The images of knight and king and queen
Wherewith the walls were pictured here and there,
Or touched rich vessels with her fingers fair,
And o'er her delicate smooth cheek would pass
The fixed bubbles of strange works of glass:
So wandered she amidst these marvels new
Until anigh the noontide now it grew.

At last she came unto a chamber cool
Paved cunningly in manner of a pool,
Where red fish seemed to swim through floating weed
And at the first she thought it so indeed,
And took the sandals quickly from her feet,
But when the glassy floor these did but meet
The shadow of a long-forgotten smile
Her anxious face a moment did beguile;
And crossing o'er, she found a table spread
With dainty food, as delicate white bread
And fruits piled up and covered savoury meat,
As though a king were coming there to eat,

For the worst vessel was of beaten gold.
Now when these dainties Psyche did behold
She fain had eaten, but did nowise dare,
Thinking she saw a god's feast lying there.
But as she turned to go the way she came
She heard a low soft voice call out her name,
Then she stood still, and trembling gazed around,
And seeing no man, nigh sank upon the ground,
Then through the empty air she heard the voice.

"O, lovely one, fear not! rather rejoice
That thou art come unto thy sovereignty:
Sit now and eat, this feast is but for thee,
Yea, do whatso thou wilt with all things here,
And in thine own house cast away thy fear,
For all is thine, and little things are these
So loved a heart as thine, awhile to please.
"Be patient! thou art loved by such a one
As will not leave thee mourning here alone,
But rather cometh on this very night;
And though he needs must hide him from thy sight
Yet all his words of love thou well mayst hear,
And pour thy woes into no careless ear.
"Bethink thee then, with what solemnity
Thy folk, thy father, did deliver thee
To him who loves thee thus, and void of dread
Remember, sweet, thou art a bride new-wed."

Now hearing this, did Psyche, trembling sore,

And yet with lighter heart than heretofore,
Sit down and eat, till she grew scarce afeard;
And nothing but the summer noise she heard
Within the garden, then, her meal being done,
Within the window-seat she watched the sun
Changing the garden-shadows, till she grew
Fearless and happy, since she deemed she knew
The worst that could befall, while still the best
Shone a fair star far off: and 'mid the rest
This brought her after all her grief and fear,
She said, "How sweet it would be, could I hear,
Soft music mate the drowsy afternoon,
And drown awhile the bees' sad murmuring tune
Within these flowering limes." E'en as she spoke,
A sweet-voiced choir of unknown unseen folk
Singing to words that match the sense of these
Hushed the faint music of the linden trees.

SONG.

OPENSIVE, tender maid, downcast and shy,
Who turnest pale e'en at the name of love,
And with flushed face must pass the elm-tree by
Ashamed to hear the passionate grey dove
Moan to his mate, thee too the god shall move,
Thee too the maidens shall ungird one day,
And with thy girdle put thy shame away.

What then, and shall white winter ne'er be done
Because the glittering frosty morn is fair?

Because against the early-setting sun
Bright show the gilded boughs though waste and bare?
Because the robin singeth free from care?
Ah! these are memories of a better day
When on earth's face the lips of summer lay.

Come then, beloved one, for such as thee
Love loveth, and their hearts he knoweth well,
Who hoard their moments of felicity,
As misers hoard the medals that they tell,
Lest on the earth but paupers they should dwell:
"We hide our love to bless another day;
The world is hard, youth passes quick," they say.

Ah, little ones, but if ye could forget
Amidst your outpoured love that you must die,
Then ye, my servants, were death's conquerers yet,
And love to you should be eternity
How quick soever might the days go by:
Yes, ye are made immortal on the day
Ye cease the dusty grains of time to weigh.

Thou hearkenest, love? O, make no semblance then
Thou art beloved, but as thy wont is
Turn thy grey eyes away from eyes of men,
With hands down-dropped, that tremble with thy bliss,
With hidden eyes, take thy first lover's kiss;
Call this eternity which is to-day,
Nor dream that this our love can pass away.

They ceased, and Psyche pondering o'er their song,
Not fearing now that aught would do her wrong,
About the chambers wandered at her will,
And on the many marvels gazed her fill,
Where'er she passed still noting everything,
Then in the gardens heard the new birds sing
And watched the red fish in the fountains play,
And at the very faintest time of day
Upon the grass lay sleeping for a while
Midst heaven-sent dreams of bliss that made her smile;
And when she woke the shades were lengthening,
So to the place where she had heard them sing
She came again, and through a little door
Entered a chamber with a marble floor,
Open a-top unto the outer air,
Beneath which lay a bath of water fair,
Paved with strange stones and figures of bright gold,
And from the steps thereof could she behold
The slim-leaved trees against the evening sky
Golden and calm, still moving languidly.
So for a time upon the brink she sat,
Debating in her mind of this and that,
And then arose and slowly from her cast
Her raiment, and adown the steps she passed
Into the water, and therein she played,
Till of herself at last she grew afraid,
And of the broken image of her face,
And the loud splashing in that lonely place.
So from the bath she gat her quietly,

And clad herself in whatso haste might be;
And when at last she was apparelled
Unto a chamber came, where was a bed
Of gold and ivory, and precious wood
Some island bears where never man has stood;
And round about hung curtains of delight,
Wherein were interwoven Day and Night
Joined by the hands of Love, and round their wings
Knots of fair flowers no earthly May-time brings.
Strange for its beauty was the coverlet,
With birds and beasts and flowers wrought over it;
And every cloth was made in daintier wise
Than any man on earth could well devise:
Yea, there such beauty was in everything,
That she, the daughter of a mighty king,
Felt strange therein, and trembled lest that she,
Deceived by dreams, had wandered heedlessly
Into a bower for some fair goddess made.
Yet if perchance some man had thither strayed,
It had been long ere he had noted aught
But her sweet face, made pensive by the thought
Of all the wonders that she moved in there.
  But looking round, upon a table fair
She saw a book wherein old tales were writ,
And by the window sat, to read in it
Until the dusk had melted into night,
When waxen tapers did her servants light
With unseen hands, until it grew like day.
  And so at last upon the bed she lay,

And slept a dreamless sleep for weariness,
Forgetting all the wonder and distress.

But at the dead of night she woke, and heard
A rustling noise, and grew right sore afeard,
Yea, could not move a finger for afright;
And all was darker now than darkest night.

Withal a voice close by her did she hear.
" Alas, my love! why tremblest thou with fear,
While I am trembling with new happiness?
Forgive me, sweet, thy terror and distress:
Not otherwise could this our meeting be.
O loveliest! such bliss awaiteth thee,
For all thy trouble and thy shameful tears,
Such nameless honour, and such happy years,
As fall not unto women of the earth.
Loved as thou art, thy short-lived pains are worth
The glory and the joy unspeakable
Wherein the Treasure of the World shall dwell:
A little hope, a little patience yet,
Ere everything thou wilt, thou may'st forget,
Or else remember as a well-told tale,
That for some pensive pleasure may avail.
Canst thou not love me, then, who wrought thy woe,
That thou the height and depth of joy mightst know?"

He spoke, and as upon the bed she lay,
Trembling amidst new thoughts, he sent a ray

Of finest love unto her inmost heart,
Till, murmuring low, she strove the night to part,
And like a bride who meets her love at last,
When the long days of yearning are o'erpast,
She reached to him her perfect arms unseen,
And said, "O Love, how wretched I have been!
What hast thou done?" And by her side he lay,
Till just before the dawning of the day.

THE sun was high when Psyche woke again,
And turning to the place where he had lain
And seeing no one, doubted of the thing
That she had dreamed it, till a fair gold ring,
Unseen before, upon her hand she found,
And touching her bright head she felt it crowned
With a bright circlet; then withal she sighed,
And wondered how the oracle had lied,
And wished her father knew it, and straightway
Rose up and clad herself. Slow went the day,
Though helped with many a solace, till came night;
And therewithal the new, unseen delight,
She learned to call her Love.

So passed away
The days and nights, until upon a day
As in the shade, at noon she lay asleep,
She dreamed that she beheld her sisters weep,

And her old father clad in sorry guise,
Grown foolish with the weight of miseries,
Her friends black-clad and moving mournfully,
And folk in wonder landed from the sea,
At such a fall of such a matchless maid,
And in some press apart her raiment laid
Like precious relics, and an empty tomb
Set in the palace telling of her doom.

Therefore she wept in sleep, and woke with tears
Still on her face, and wet hair round her ears,
And went about unhappily that day,
Framing a gentle speech wherewith to pray
For leave to see her sisters once again,
That they might know her happy, and her pain
Turned all to joy, and honour come from shame.

And so at last night and her lover came,
And midst their fondling, suddenly she said,
" O Love, a little time we have been wed,
And yet I ask a boon of thee this night."

" Psyche," he said, " if my heart tells me right,
This thy desire may bring us bitter woe,
For who the shifting chance of fate can know?
Yet, forasmuch as mortal hearts are weak,
To-morrow shall my folk thy sisters seek,
And bear them hither; but before the day
Is fully ended must they go away.
And thou—beware—for, fresh and good and true,
Thou knowest not what worldly hearts may do,
Or what a curse gold is unto the earth.

Beware lest from thy full heart, in thy mirth,
Thou tell'st the story of thy love unseen:
Thy loving, simple heart, fits not a queen."
Then by her kisses did she know he frowned,
But close about him her fair arms she wound,
Until for happiness he 'gan to smile,
And in those arms forgat all else awhile.

So the next day, for joy that they should come,
Would Psyche further deck her strange new home,
And even as she 'gan to think the thought,
Quickly her will by unseen hands was wrought,
Who came and went like thoughts. Yea, how should I
Tell of the works of gold and ivory,
The gems and images, those hands brought there;
The prisoned things of earth, and sea, and air,
They brought to please their mistress? Many a beast,
Such as King Bacchus in his reckless feast
Makes merry with—huge elephants, snow-white
With gilded tusks, or dusky-grey with bright
And shining chains about their wrinkled necks;
The mailed rhinoceros, that of nothing recks;
Dusky-maned lions; spotted leopards fair
That through the cane-brake move, unseen as air;
The deep-mouthed tiger, dread of the brown man;
The eagle, and the peacock, and the swan—
—These be the nobles of the birds and beasts.
But therewithal, for laughter at their feasts,
They brought them the gods' jesters, such as be

Quick-chattering apes, that yet in mockery
Of anxious men wrinkle their ugly brows;
Strange birds with pouches, birds with beaks like prows
Of merchant-ships, with tufted crests like threads,
With unimaginable monstrous heads.
Lo, such as these, in many a gilded cage
They brought, or chained for fear of sudden rage.
Then strewed they scented branches on the floor,
And hung rose-garlands up by the great door,
And wafted incense through the bowers and halls,
And hung up fairer hangings on the walls,
And filled the baths with water fresh and clear,
And in the chambers laid apparel fair,
And spread a table for a royal feast.
Then when from all these labours they had ceased,
Psyche they sung to sleep with lullabies;
Who slept not long, but opening soon her eyes,
Beheld her sisters on the threshold stand:
Then did she run to take them by the hand,
And laid her cheek to theirs, and murmured words
Of little meaning, like the moan of birds,
While they bewildered stood and gazed around,
Like people who in some strange land have found,
One that they thought not of; but she at last
Stood back, and from her face the strayed locks cast,
And, smiling through her tears, said, "Ah, that ye
Should have to weep such useless tears for me!
Alas, the burden that the city bears
For nought! O me, my father's burning tears,

That into all this honour I am come!
Nay, does he live yet? Is the ancient home
Still standing? do the galleys throng the quays?
Do the brown Indians glitter down the ways
With rubies as of old? Yes, yes, ye smile,
For ye are thinking, but a little while
Apart from these has she been dwelling here;
Truly, yet long enough, loved ones and dear,
To make me other than I was of old,
Though now when your dear faces I behold
Am I myself again. But by what road
Have ye been brought to this my new abode?"

"Sister," said one, "I rose up from my bed
It seems this morn, and being apparelled,
And walking in my garden, in a swoon
Helpless and unattended I sank down,
Wherefrom I scarce am waked, for as a dream
Dost thou with all this royal glory seem,
But for thy kisses and thy words, O love."

"Yea, Psyche," said the other, "as I drove
The ivory shuttle through the shuttle-race,
All was changed suddenly, and in this place
I found myself, and standing on my feet,
Where me with sleepy words this one did greet.
Now, sister, tell us whence these wonders come
With all the godlike splendour of your home."

"Sisters," she said, "more marvels shall ye see
When ye have been a little while with me,

Whereof I cannot tell you more than this
That 'midst them all I dwell in ease and bliss,
Well-loved and wedded to a mighty lord,
Fair beyond measure, from whose loving word
I know that happier days await me yet.
But come, my sisters, let us now forget
To seek for empty knowledge; ye shall take
Some little gifts for your lost sister's sake;
And whatso wonders ye may see or hear
Of nothing frightful have ye any fear."

Wondering they went with her, and looking round,
Each in the other's eyes a strange look found,
For these, her mother's daughters, had no part
In her divine fresh singleness of heart,
But longing to be great, remembered not
How short a time one heart on earth has got.

But keener still that guarded look now grew
As more of that strange lovely place they knew,
And as with growing hate, but still afeard,
The unseen choirs' heart-softening strains they heard,
Which did but harden these; and when at noon
They sought the shaded waters' freshening boon,
And all unhidden once again they saw
That peerless beauty, free from any flaw,
Which now at last had won its precious meed,
Her kindness then but fed the fire of greed
Within their hearts—her gifts, the rich attire
Wherewith she clad them, where like sparks of fire
The many-coloured gems shone midst the pearls,

The soft silks' winding lines, the work of girls
By the Five Rivers; their fair marvellous crowns,
Their sandals' fastenings worth the rent of towns,
Zones and carved rings, and nameless wonders fair,
All things her faithful slaves had brought them there,
Given amid kisses, made them not more glad;
Since in their hearts the ravening worm they had
That love slays not, nor yet is satisfied
While aught but he has aught; yet still they tried
To look as they deemed loving folk should look,
And still with words of love her bounty took.

So at the last all being apparelled,
Her sisters to the banquet Psyche led,
Fair were they, and each seemed a glorious queen
With all that wondrous daintiness beseen,
But Psyche clad in gown of dusky blue
Little adorned, with deep grey eyes that knew
The hidden marvels of Love's holy fire,
Seemed like the soul of innocent desire,
Shut from the mocking world, wherefrom those twain
Seemed come to lure her thence with labour vain.

Now having reached the place where they should eat,
Ere 'neath the canopy the three took seat,
The eldest sister unto Psyche said,
"And he, dear love, the man that thou hast wed,
Will he not wish to-day thy kin to see?
Then could we tell of thy felicity

The better, to our folk and father dear."
Then Psyche reddened, "Nay, he is not here,"
She stammered, "neither will be here to-day,
For mighty matters keep him far away."
"Alas!" the younger sister said, "Say then,
What is the likeness of this first of men;
What sayest thou about his loving eyne,
Are his locks black, or golden-red as thine?"
"Black-haired like me," said Psyche stammering,
And looking round, "what say I? like the king
Who rules the world, he seems to me at least—
Come, sisters, sit, and let us make good feast!
My darling and my love ye shall behold
I doubt not soon, his crispy hair of gold,
His eyes unseen; and ye shall hear his voice,
That in my joy ye also may rejoice."

Then did they hold their peace, although indeed
Her stammering haste they did not fail to heed.
But at their wondrous royal feast they sat
Thinking their thoughts, and spoke of this or that
Between the bursts of music, until when
The sun was leaving the abodes of men;
And then must Psyche to her sisters say
That she was bid, her husband being away,
To suffer none at night to harbour there,
No, not the mother that her body bare
Or father that begat her, therefore they
Must leave her now, till some still happier day.

And therewithal more precious gifts she brought
Whereof not e'en in dreams they could have thought,
Things whereof noble stories might be told;
And said; "These matters that you here behold
Shall be the worst of gifts that you shall have;
Farewell, farewell! and may the high gods save
Your lives and fame; and tell our father dear
Of all the honour that I live in here,
And how that greater happiness shall come
When I shall reach a long-enduring home."

Then these, though burning through the night to stay,
Spake loving words, and went upon their way,
When weeping she had kissed them; but they wept
Such tears as traitors do, for as they stepped
Over the threshold, in each other's eyes
They looked, for each was eager to surprise
The envy that their hearts were filled withal,
That to their lips came welling up like gall.

"So," said the first, "this palace without folk,
These wonders done with none to strike a stroke,
This singing in the air, and no one seen,
These gifts too wonderful for any queen,
The trance wherein we both were wrapt away,
And set down by her golden house to-day—
—These are the deeds of gods, and not of men;
And fortunate the day was to her, when
Weeping she left the house where we were born,
And all men deemed her shamed and most forlorn."

Then said the other, reddening in her rage,
"She is the luckiest one of all this age;
And yet she might have told us of her case,
What god it is that dwelleth in the place,
Nor sent us forth like beggars from her gate.
And beggarly, O sister, is our fate,
Whose husbands wring from miserable hinds
What the first battle scatters to the winds;
While she to us whom from her door she drives
And makes of no account or honour, gives
Such wonderful and priceless gifts as these,
Fit to bedeck the limbs of goddesses!
And yet who knows but she may get a fall?
The strongest tower has not the highest wall,
Think well of this, when you sit safe at home."

By this unto the river were they come,
Where waited Zephyrus unseen, who cast
A languor over them that quickly passed
Into deep sleep, and on the grass they sank;
Then straightway did he lift them from the bank,
And quickly each in her fair house set down,
Then flew aloft above the sleeping town.

Long in their homes they brooded over this,
And how that Psyche nigh a goddess is;
While all folk deemed that she quite lost had been,
For nought they said of all that they had seen.

But now that night when she, with many a kiss,
Had told their coming, and of that and this

That happed, he said, "These things, O Love, are well;
Glad am I that no evil thing befell.
And yet, between thy father's house and me
Must thou choose now; then either royally
Shalt thou go home, and wed some King at last,
And have no harm for all that here has passed;
Or else, my love, bear as thy brave heart may,
This loneliness in hope of that fair day,
Which, by my head, shall come to thee; and then
Shalt thou be glorious to the sons of men,
And by my side shalt sit in such estate
That in all time all men shall sing thy fate."

But with that word such love through her he breathed,
That round about him her fair arms she wreathed;
And so with loving passed the night away,
And with fresh hope came on the fresh May-day.
And so passed many a day and many a night.
And weariness was balanced with delight,
And into such a mind was Psyche brought,
That little of her father's house she thought,
But ever of the happy day to come
When she should go unto her promised home.

Till she that threw the golden apple down
Upon the board, and lighted up Troy town,
On dusky wings came flying o'er the place,
And seeing Psyche with her happy face
Asleep beneath some fair tree blossoming,
Into her sleep straight cast an evil thing;

Whereby she dreamed she saw her father laid
Panting for breath beneath the golden shade
Of his great bed's embroidered canopy,
And with his last breath moaning heavily
Her name and fancied woes; thereat she woke,
And this ill dream through all her quiet broke,
And when next morn her love from her would go,
And going, as it was his wont to do,
Would kiss her sleeping, he must find the tears
Filling the hollows of her rosy ears
And wetting half the golden hair that lay
'Twixt him and her: then did he speak and say,
"O Love, why dost thou lie awake and weep,
Who for content shouldst have good heart to sleep
This cold hour ere the dawning?" Nought she said,
But wept aloud. Then cried he, "By my head!
Whate'er thou wishest I will do for thee;
Yea, if it make an end of thee and me."
"O Love," she said, "I scarce dare ask again,
Yet is there in mine heart an aching pain
To know what of my father is become:
So would I send my sisters to my home,
Because I doubt indeed they never told
Of all my honour in this house of gold;
So now of them a great oath would I take."
He said, "Alas! and hast thou been awake
For them indeed? who in my arms asleep
Mightst well have been; for their sakes didst thou weep,

Who mightst have smiled to feel my kiss on thee?
Yet as thou wishest once more shall it be,
Because my oath constrains me, and thy tears.
And yet again beware, and make these fears
Of none avail; nor waver any more,
I pray thee: for already to the shore
Of all delights and joys thou drawest nigh."

He spoke, and from the chamber straight did fly
To highest heaven, and going softly then,
Wearied the father of all gods and men
With prayers for Psyche's immortality.

Meantime went Zephyrus across the sea,
To bring her sisters to her arms again,
Though of that message little was he fain,
Knowing their malice and their cankered hearts.
For now these two had thought upon their parts,
And made up a false tale for Psyche's ear;
For when awaked, to her they drew anear,
Sobbing, their faces in their hands they hid,
Nor when she asked them why this thing they did
Would answer aught, till trembling Psyche said,
"Nay, nay, what is it? is our father dead?
Or do ye weep these tears for shame that ye
Have told him not of my felicity,
To make me weep amidst my new-found bliss?
Be comforted, for short the highway is
To my forgiveness: this day shall ye go

And take him gifts, and tell him all ye know
Of this my unexpected happy lot."
Amidst fresh sobs one said, "We told him not;
But by good counsel did we hide the thing,
Deeming it well that he should feel the sting
For once, than for awhile be glad again,
And after come to suffer double pain."
"Alas! what mean you, sister?" Psyche said,
For terror waxing pale as are the dead.
"O sister, speak!" "Child, by this loving kiss,"
Spake one of them, "and that remembered bliss
We dwelt in when our mother was alive,
Or ever we began with ills to strive,
By all the hope thou hast to see again
Our aged father and to soothe his pain,
I charge thee tell me,— Hast thou seen the thing
Thou callest Husband?"
Breathless, quivering,
Psyche cried out, "Alas! what sayest thou?
What riddles wilt thou speak unto me now?"
"Alas!" she said; "then is it as I thought.
Sister, in dreadful places have we sought
To learn about thy case, and thus we found
A wise man, dwelling underneath the ground
In a dark awful cave: he told to us
A horrid tale thereof, and piteous,
That thou wert wedded to an evil thing,
A serpent-bodied fiend of poisonous sting,
Bestial of form, yet therewith lacking not

E'en such a soul as wicked men have got,
Thus ages long agone the gods made him,
And set him in a lake hereby to swim;
But every hundred years he hath this grace,
That he may change within this golden place
Into a fair young man by night alone.
Alas, my sister, thou hast cause to groan!
What sayest thou?—*His words are fair and soft;*
He raineth loving kisses on me oft,
Weeping for love; he tells me of a day
When from this place we both shall go away,
And he shall kiss me then no more unseen,
The while I sit by him a glorious queen——
— Alas, poor child! it pleaseth thee, his kiss?
Then must I show thee why he doeth this:
Because he willeth for a time to save
Thy body, wretched one! that he may have
Both child and mother for his watery hell —
Ah, what a tale this is for me to tell!

"Thou prayest us to save thee, and we can;
Since for nought else we sought that wise old man,
Who for great gifts and seeing that of kings
We both were come, has told us all these things,
And given us a fair lamp of hallowed oil
That he has wrought with danger and much toil;
And thereto has he added a sharp knife,
In forging which he well-nigh lost his life,
About him so the devils of the pit
Came swarming—O, my sister, hast thou it?"

Straight from her gown the other one drew out
The lamp and knife, which Psyche, dumb with doubt
And misery at once, took in her hand.
Then said her sister, "From this doubtful land
Thou gav'st us royal gifts a while ago,
But these we give thee, though they lack for show,
Shall be to thee a better gift,—thy life.
Put now in some sure place this lamp and knife,
And when he sleeps rise silently from bed
And hold the hallowed lamp above his head,
And swiftly draw the charmed knife across
His cursed neck, thou well may'st bear the loss,
Nor shall he keep his man's shape more, when he
First feels the iron wrought so mysticly:
But thou, flee unto us, we have a tale,
Of what has been thy lot within this vale,
When we have 'scaped therefrom, which we shall do
By virtue of strange spells the old man knew.
Farewell, sweet sister! here we may not stay,
Lest in returning he should pass this way;
But in the vale we will not fail to wait
Till thou art loosened from thine evil fate."
Thus went they, and for long they said not aught,
Fearful lest any should surprise their thought,
But in such wise had envy conquered fear,
That they were fain that eve to bide anear
Their sister's ruined home; but when they came
Unto the river, on them fell the same
Resistless languor they had felt before,

And from the blossoms of that flowery shore
Their sleeping bodies soon did Zephyr bear,
For other folk to hatch new ills and care.

But on the ground sat Psyche all alone,
The lamp and knife beside her, and no moan
She made, but silent let the long hours go,
Till dark night closed around her and her woe.
Then trembling she arose, for now drew near
The time of utter loneliness and fear,
And she must think of death, who until now
Had thought of ruined life, and love brought low;
And with that thought, tormenting doubt there came,
And images of some unheard-of shame,
Until forlorn, entrapped of gods she felt,
As though in some strange hell her spirit dwelt.
Yet driven by her sisters' words at last,
And by remembrance of the time now past,
When she stood trembling, as the oracle
With all its fearful doom upon her fell,
She to her hapless wedding chamber turned,
And while the waxen tapers freshly burned
She laid those dread gifts ready to her hand,
Then quenched the lights, and by the bed did stand,
Turning these matters in her troubled mind;
And sometimes hoped some glorious man to find
Beneath the lamp, fit bridegroom for a bride
Like her; ah, then! with what joy to his side
Would she creep back in the dark silent night;

But whiles she quaked at thought of what a sight
The lamp might show her; the hot rush of blood
The knife might shed upon her as she stood,
The dread of some pursuit, the hurrying out,
Through rooms where every sound would seem a shout
Into the windy night among the trees,
Where many a changing monstrous sight one sees,
When nought at all has happed to chill the blood.

But as among these evil thoughts she stood,
She heard him coming, and straight crept to bed,
And felt him touch her with a new-born dread,
And durst not answer to his words of love.
But when he slept, she rose that tale to prove.
And sliding down as softly as might be,
And moving through the chamber quietly,
She gat the lamp within her trembling hand,
And long, debating still these things, did stand
In that thick darkness, till she seemed to be
A dweller in some black eternity,
And what she once had called the world did seem
A hollow void, a colourless mad dream;
For she felt so alone—three times in vain
She moved her heavy hand, three times again
It fell adown; at last throughout the place
Its flame glared, lighting up her woeful face,
Whose eyes the silken carpet did but meet,
Grown strange and awful, and her own wan feet
As toward the bed she stole; but come thereto

Back with closed eyes and quivering lips, she threw
Her lovely head, and strove to think of it,
While images of fearful things did flit
Before her eyes; thus, raising up the hand
That bore the lamp, one moment did she stand
As man's time tells it, and then suddenly
Opened her eyes, but scarce kept back a cry
At what she saw; for there before her lay
The very Love brighter than dawn of day;
And as he lay there smiling, her own name
His gentle lips in sleep began to frame,
And as to touch her face his hand did move;
O then, indeed, her faint heart swelled for love,
And she began to sob, and tears fell fast
Upon the bed.—But as she turned at last
To quench the lamp, there happed a little thing
That quenched her new delight, for flickering
The treacherous flame cast on his shoulder fair
A burning drop; he woke, and seeing her there
The meaning of that sad sight knew full well,
Nor was there need the piteous tale to tell.

Then on her knees she fell with a great cry,
For in his face she saw the thunder nigh,
And she began to know what she had done,
And saw herself henceforth, unloved, alone,
Pass onward to the grave; and once again
She heard the voice she now must love in vain.

"Ah, has it come to pass? and hast thou lost
A life of love, and must thou still be tossed
One moment in the sun 'twixt night and night?
And must I lose what would have been delight,
Untasted yet amidst immortal bliss,
To wed a soul made worthy of my kiss,
Set in a frame so wonderfully made.

"O wavering heart, farewell! be not afraid
That I with fire will burn thy body fair,
Or cast thy sweet limbs piecemeal through the air;
The fates shall work thy punishment alone,
And thine own memory of our kindness done.

"Alas! what wilt thou do? how shalt thou bear
The cruel world, the sickening still despair,
The mocking, curious faces bent on thee,
When thou hast known what love there is in me?
O happy only, if thou couldst forget,
And live unholpen, lonely, loveless yet,
But untormented through the little span
That on the earth ye call the life of man.
Alas! that thou, too fair a thing to die,
Shouldst so be born to double misery!

"Farewell! though I, a god, can never know
How thou canst lose thy pain, yet time will go
Over thine head, and thou mayst mingle yet
The bitter and the sweet, nor quite forget,
Nor quite remember, till these things shall seem
The wavering memory of a lovely dream."

Therewith he caught his shafts up and his bow,
And striding through the chambers did he go,
Light all around him; and she, wailing sore,
Still followed after; but he turned no more,
And when into the moonlit night he came
From out her sight he vanished like a flame,
And on the threshold till the dawn of day
Through all the changes of the night she lay.

AT daybreak when she lifted up her eyes,
She looked around with heavy dull surprise,
And rose to enter the fair golden place;
But then remembering all her piteous case
She turned away, lamenting very sore,
And wandered down unto the river shore;
There, at the head of a green pool and deep,
She stood so long that she forgot to weep,
And the wild things about the water-side
From such a silent thing cared not to hide;
The dace pushed 'gainst the stream, the dragon-fly,
With its green-painted wing went flickering by;
The water-hen, the lustred kingfisher,
Went on their ways and took no heed of her;
The little reed birds never ceased to sing,
And still the eddy, like a living thing,
Broke into sudden gurgles at her feet.

But 'midst these fair things, on that morning sweet,
How could she, weary creature, find a place?
She moved at last, and lifting up her face,
Gathered her raiment up and cried, "Farewell,
O fairest lord! and since I cannot dwell
With thee in heaven, let me now hide my head
In whatsoever dark place dwell the dead!"
And with that word she leapt into the stream,
But the kind river even yet did deem
That she should live, and, with all gentle care,
Cast her ashore within a meadow fair.
Upon the other side, where Shepherd Pan
Sat looking down upon the water wan,
Goat-legged and merry, who called out, "Fair maid,
Why goest thou hurrying to the feeble shade
Whence none return? Well do I know thy pain,
For I am old, and have not lived in vain;
Thou wilt forget all that within a while,
And on some other happy youth wilt smile;
And sure he must be dull indeed if he
Forget not all things in his ecstasy
At sight of such a wonder made for him,
That in that clinging gown makes mine eyes swim,
Old as I am: but to the god of Love
Pray now, sweet child, for all things can he move."
Weeping she passed him, but full reverently,
And well she saw that she was not to die
Till she had filled the measure of her woe.

So through the meads she passed, half blind and slow,
And on her sisters somewhat now she thought;
And, pondering on the evil they had wrought,
The veil fell from her, and she saw their guile.
"Alas!" she said, "can death make folk so vile?
What wonder that the gods are glorious then,
Who cannot feel the hates and fears of men?
Sisters, alas, for what ye used to be!
Once did I think, whatso might hap to me,
Still at the worst, within your arms to find
A haven of pure love; then were ye kind,
Then was your joy e'en as my very own—
And now, and now, if I can be alone
That is my best: but that can never be,
For your unkindness still shall stay with me
When ye are dead—But thou, my love! my dear!
Wert thou not kind?—I should have lost my fear
Within a little—Yea, and e'en just now
With angry godhead on thy lovely brow,
Still thou wert kind—And art thou gone away
For ever? I know not, but day by day
Still will I seek thee till I come to die,
And nurse remembrance of felicity
Within my heart, although it wound me sore;
For what am I but thine for evermore!"

Thenceforth her back upon the world she turned
As she had known it; in her heart there burned
Such deathless love, that still untired she went:

The huntsman dropping down the woody bent,
In the still evening, saw her passing by,
And for her beauty fain would draw anigh,
But yet durst not; the shepherd on the down
Wondering, would shade his eyes with fingers brown,
As on the hill's brow, looking o'er the lands,
She stood with straining eyes and clasped hands,
While the wind blew the raiment from her feet;
The wandering soldier her grey eyes would meet,
That took no heed of him, and drop his own;
Like a thin dream she passed the clattering town;
On the thronged quays she watched the ships come in
Patient, amid the strange outlandish din;
Unscared she saw the sacked towns' miseries,
And marching armies passed before her eyes.
And still of her the god had such a care
None did her wrong, although alone and fair.
Through rough and smooth she wandered many a day,
Till all her hope had well-nigh passed away.

Meanwhile the sisters, each in her own home,
Waited the day when outcast she should come
And ask their pity; when perchance, indeed,
They looked to give her shelter in her need,
And with soft words such faint reproaches take
As she durst make them for her ruin's sake;
But day passed day, and still no Psyche came,
And while they wondered whether, to their shame,
Their plot had failed, or gained its end too well,

And Psyche slain, no tale thereof could tell.—
Amidst these things, the eldest sister lay
Asleep one evening of a summer day,
Dreaming she saw the god of love anigh,
Who seemed to say unto her lovingly,
"Hail unto thee, fair sister of my love;
Nor fear me for that thou her faith didst prove,
And found it wanting, for thou, too, art fair,
Her place unfilled; rise then, and have no care
For father or for friends, but go straightway
Unto the rock where she was borne that day;
There, if thou hast a will to be my bride,
Put thou all fear of horrid death aside,
And leap from off the cliff, and there will come
My slaves, to bear thee up and take thee home.
Haste then, before the summer night grows late,
For in my house thy beauty I await!"

So spake the dream; and through the night did sail,
And to the other sister bore the tale,
While this one rose, nor doubted of the thing,
Such deadly pride unto her heart did cling;
But by the tapers' light triumphantly,
Smiling, her mirrored body did she eye,
Then hastily rich raiment on her cast
And through the sleeping serving-people passed,
And looked with changed eyes on the moonlit street,
Nor scarce could feel the ground beneath her feet.
But long the time seemed to her, till she came

There where her sister once was borne to shame ;
And when she reached the bare cliff's rugged brow
She cried aloud, "O Love receive me now,
Who am not all unworthy to be thine !"
And with that word, her jewelled arms did shine
Outstretched beneath the moon, and with one breath
She sprung to meet the outstretched arms of Death,
The only god that waited for her there,
And in a gathered moment of despair
A hideous thing her traitrous life did seem.

But with the passing of that hollow dream
The other sister rose, and as she might,
Arrayed herself alone in that still night,
And so stole forth, and making no delay
Came to the rock anigh the dawn of day ;
No warning there her sister's spirit gave,
No doubt came nigh her the doomed soul to save,
But with a fever burning in her blood,
With glittering eyes and crimson cheeks she stood
One moment on the brow, the while she cried,
"Receive me, Love, chosen to be thy bride
From all the million women of the world !"
Then o'er the cliff her wicked limbs were hurled,
Nor has the language of the earth a name
For that surprise of terror and of shame.

NOW, midst her wanderings, on a hot noontide,
Psyche passed down a road, where, on each side
The yellow cornfields lay, although as yet
Unto the stalks no sickle had been set;
The lark sung over them, the butterfly
Flickered from ear to ear distractedly,
The kestrel hung above, the weasel peered
From out the wheat stalks on her unafeard,
Along the road the trembling poppies shed
On the burnt grass their crumpled leaves and red;
Most lonely was it, nothing Psyche knew
Unto what land of all the world she drew;
Aweary was she, faint and sick at heart,
Bowed to the earth by thoughts of that sad part
She needs must play: some blue flower from the corn
That in her fingers erewhile she had borne,
Now dropped from them, still clung unto her gown;
Over the hard way hung her head adown
Despairingly, but still her weary feet
Moved on half conscious, her lost love to meet.
So going, at the last she raised her eyes,
And saw a grassy mound before her rise
Over the yellow plain, and thereon was
A marble fane with doors of burnished brass,
That 'twixt the pillars set about it burned;
So thitherward from off the road she turned,
And soon she heard a rippling water sound,
And reached a stream that girt the hill around,

Whose green waves wooed her body lovingly;
So looking round, and seeing no soul anigh,
Unclad, she crossed the shallows, and there laid
Her dusty raiment in the alder-shade,
And slipped adown into the shaded pool,
And with the pleasure of the water cool
Soothed her tired limbs awhile, then with a sigh
Came forth, and clad her body hastily,
And up the hill made for the little fane.

But when its threshold now her feet did gain,
She, looking through the pillars of the shrine,
Beheld therein a golden image shine
Of golden Ceres; then she passed the door,
And with bowed head she stood awhile before
The smiling image, striving for some word
That did not name her lover and her lord,
Until midst rising tears at last she prayed:

"O kind one, if while yet I was a maid
I ever did thee pleasure, on this day
Be kind to me, poor wanderer on the way,
Who strive my love upon the earth to meet!
Then let me rest my weary, doubtful feet
Within thy quiet house a little while,
And on my rest if thou wouldst please to smile,
And send me news of my own love and lord,
It would not cost thee, lady, many a word."

But straight from out the shrine a sweet voice came,
"O Psyche, though of me thou hast no blame,
And though indeed thou sparedst not to give

What my soul loved, while happy thou didst live,
Yet little can I give now unto thee,
Since thou art rebel, slave, and enemy
Unto the love-inspiring Queen; this grace
Thou hast alone of me, to leave this place
Free as thou camest, though the lovely one
Seeks for the sorceress who entrapped her son
In every land, and has small joy in aught,
Until before her presence thou art brought."

Then Psyche, trembling at the words she spake,
Durst answer nought, nor for that counsel's sake
Could other offerings leave except her tears,
As now, tormented by the new-born fears
The words divine had raised in her, she passed
The brazen threshold once again, and cast
A dreary hopeless look across the plain,
Whose golden beauty now seemed nought and vain
Unto her aching heart; then down the hill
She went, and crossed the shallows of the rill,
And wearily she went upon her way,
Nor any homestead passed upon that day,
Nor any hamlet, and at night lay down
Within a wood, far off from any town.

There, waking at the dawn, did she behold,
Through the green leaves, a glimmer as of gold,
And, passing on, amidst an oak grove found
A gold-adorned pillared temple round,
Whose walls were hung with rich and precious things,

Worthy to be the ransom of great kings;
And in the midst of gold and ivory
An image of Queen Juno did she see;
Then her heart swelled within her, and she thought,
"Surely the gods hereto my steps have brought,
And they will yet be merciful and give
Some little joy to me, that I may live
Till my love finds me." Then upon her knees
She fell, and prayed, "O Crown of goddesses,
I pray thee, give me shelter in this place,
Nor turn away from me thy much-loved face,
If ever I gave golden gifts to thee
In happier times when my right hand was free."

Then from the inmost shrine there came a voice
That said, "It is so, well mayst thou rejoice
That of thy gifts I yet have memory,
Wherefore mayst thou depart forewarned and free;
Since she that won the golden apple lives,
And to her servants mighty gifts now gives
To find thee out, in whatso land thou art,
For thine undoing: loiter not, depart!
For what immortal yet shall shelter thee
From her that rose from out the unquiet sea?"

Then Psyche moaned out in her grief and fear,
"Alas! and is there shelter anywhere
Upon the green flame-hiding earth?" said she,
"Or yet beneath it is there peace for me?
O Love, since in thine arms I cannot rest,
Or lay my weary head upon thy breast,

Have pity yet upon thy love forlorn,
Make me as though I never had been born!"

Then wearily she went upon her way,
And so, about the middle of the day,
She came before a green and flowery place,
Walled round about in manner of a chase,
Whereof the gates as now were open wide;
Fair grassy glades and long she saw inside
Betwixt great trees, down which the unscared deer
Were playing; yet a pang of deadly fear,
She knew not why, shot coldly through her heart,
And thrice she turned as though she would depart,
And thrice returned, and in the gateway stood
With wavering feet: small flowers as red as blood
Were growing up amid the soft green grass,
And here and there a fallen rose there was,
And on the trodden grass a silken lace,
As though crowned revellers had passed by the place;
The restless sparrows chirped upon the wall
And faint far music on her ears did fall,
And from the trees within, the pink-foot doves
Still told their weary tale unto their loves,
And all seemed peaceful more than words could say.
Then she, whose heart still whispered, "Keep away,"
Was drawn by strong desire unto the place,
So toward the greenest glade she set her face,
Murmuring, "Alas! and what a wretch am I,
That I should fear the summer's greenery!

Yea, and is death now any more an ill,
When lonely through the world I wander still."
But when she was amidst those ancient groves,
Whose close green leaves and choirs of moaning doves
Shut out the world, then so alone she seemed,
So strange, her former life was but as dreamed;
Beside the hopes and fears that drew her on,
Till so far through that green place she had won,
That she a rose-hedged garden could behold
Before a house made beautiful with gold;
Which, to her mind beset with that past dream,
And dim foreshadowings of ill fate, did seem
That very house, her joy and misery,
Where that fair sight her longing eyes did see
They should not see again; but now the sound
Of pensive music ringing all around,
Made all things like a picture, and from thence
Bewildering odours floating, dulled her sense,
And killed her fear, and, urged by strong desire
To see how all should end, she drew yet nigher,
And o'er the hedge beheld the heads of girls
Embraced by garlands fresh and orient pearls,
And heard sweet voices murmuring; then a thrill
Of utmost joy all memory seemed to kill
Of good or evil, and her eager hand
Was on the wicket, then her feet did stand
Upon new flowers, the while her dizzied eyes
Gazed wildly round on half-seen mysteries,
And wandered from unnoting face to face.

For round a fountain midst the flowery place
Did she behold full many a minstrel girl;
While nigh them, on the grass in giddy whirl,
Bright raiment and white limbs and sandalled feet
Flew round in time unto the music sweet,
Whose strains no more were pensive now or sad,
But rather a fresh sound of triumph had;
And round the dance were gathered damsels fair,
Clad in rich robes adorned with jewels rare;
Or little hidden by some woven mist,
That, hanging round them, here a bosom kissed
And there a knee, or driven by the wind
About some lily's bowing stem was twined.

But when a little Psyche's eyes grew clear,
A sight they saw that brought back all her fear
A hundred fold, though neither heaven nor earth
To such a fair sight elsewhere could give birth;
Because apart, upon a golden throne
Of marvellous work, a woman sat alone,
Watching the dancers with a smiling face,
Whose beauty sole had lighted up the place.
A crown there was upon her glorious head,
A garland round about her girdlestead,
Where matchless wonders of the hidden sea
Were brought together and set wonderfully;
Naked she was of all else, but her hair
About her body rippled here and there,
And lay in heaps upon the golden seat,

And even touched the gold cloth where her feet
Lay amid roses—ah, how kind she seemed!
What depths of love from out her grey eyes beamed;

Well might the birds leave singing on the trees
To watch in peace that crown of goddesses,
Yet well might Psyche sicken at the sight,
And feel her feet wax heavy, her head light;
For now at last her evil day was come,
Since she had wandered to the very home
Of her most cruel and bitter enemy.
Half-dead, yet must she turn about to flee,
But as her eyes back o'er her shoulder gazed,
And with weak hands her clinging gown she raised,
And from her lips unwitting came a moan,
She felt strong arms about her body thrown,
And, blind with fear, was haled along till she
Saw floating by her faint eyes dizzily
That vision of the pearls and roses fresh,
The golden carpet and the rosy flesh.
Then, as in vain she strove to make some sound,
A sweet voice seemed to pierce the air around
With bitter words; her doom rang in her ears,
She felt the misery that lacketh tears.
"Come hither, damsels, and the pearl behold
That hath no price? See now the thrice tried gold,
That all men worshipped, that a god would have
To be his bride! how like a wretched slave
She cowers down, and lacketh even voice

To plead her cause! Come, damsels, and rejoice,
That now once more the waiting world will move,
Since she is found, the well-loved soul of love!
"And thou poor wretch, what god hath led thee here?
Art thou so lost in this abyss of fear,
Thou canst not weep thy misery and shame?
Canst thou not even speak thy shameful name?"

But even then the flame of fervent love
In Psyche's tortured heart began to move,
And gave her utterance, and she said, "Alas!
Surely the end of life has come to pass
For me, who have been bride of very Love,
Yet love still bides in me, O Seed of Jove,
For such I know thee; slay me, nought is lost!
For had I had the will to count the cost
And buy my love with all this misery,
Thus and no otherwise the thing should be.
Would I were dead, my wretched beauty gone,
No trouble now to thee or any one!"
And with that last word did she hang her head,
As one who hears not, whatsoe'er is said;
But Venus rising with a dreadful cry
Said, "O thou fool, I will not let thee die!
But thou shalt reap the harvest thou hast sown
And many a day thy wretched lot bemoan.
Thou art my slave, and not a day shall be
But I will find some fitting task for thee,
Nor will I slay thee till thou hop'st again.

What, thinkest thou that utterly in vain
Jove is my sire, and in despite my will
That thou canst mock me with thy beauty still?
Come forth, O strong-armed, punish this new slave,
That she henceforth a humble heart may have."
All round about the damsels in a ring
Were drawn to see the ending of the thing,
And now as Psyche's eyes stared wildly round
No help in any face of them she found
As from the fair and dreadful face she turned
In whose grey eyes such steadfast anger burned;
Yet midst her agony she scarcely knew
What thing it was the goddess bade them do,
And all the pageant, like a dreadful dream
Hopeless and long-enduring grew to seem;
Yea, when the strong-armed through the crowd did break,
Girls like to those, whose close-locked squadrons shake
The echoing surface of the Asian plain,
And when she saw their threatening hands, in vain
She strove to speak, so like a dream it was;
So like a dream that this should come to pass,
And 'neath her feet the green earth opened not.
But when her breaking heart again waxed hot
With dreadful thoughts and prayers unspeakable
As all their bitter torment on her fell,
When she her own voice heard, nor knew its sound,
And like red flame she saw the trees and ground,
Then first she seemed to know what misery

To helpless folk upon the earth can be.

But while beneath the many moving feet
The small crushed flowers sent up their odour sweet,
Above sat Venus, calm, and very fair,
Her white limbs bared of all her golden hair,
Into her heart all wrath cast back again,
As on the terror and the helpless pain
She gazed with gentle eyes, and unmoved smile;
Such as in Cyprus, the fair blossomed isle,
When on the altar in the summer night
They pile the roses up for her delight,
Men see within their hearts, and long that they
Unto her very body there might pray.
At last to them some dainty sign she made
To hold their cruel hands, and therewith bade
To bear her slave new gained from out her sight
And keep her safely till the morrow's light:
So her across the sunny sward they led
With fainting limbs, and heavy downcast head,
And into some nigh lightless prison cast
To brood alone o'er happy days long past
And all the dreadful times that yet should be.
But she being gone, one moment pensively
The goddess did the distant hills behold,
Then bade her girls bind up her hair of gold,
And veil her breast, the very forge of love,
With raiment that no earthly shuttle wove,
And 'gainst the hard earth arm her lovely feet:

Then she went forth, some shepherd king to meet
Deep in the hollow of a shaded vale,
To make his woes a long-enduring tale.

BUT over Psyche, hapless and forlorn,
Unseen the sun rose on the morrow morn,
Nor knew she aught about the death of night
Until her gaoler's torches filled with light
The dreary place, blinding her unused eyes,
And she their voices heard that bade her rise;
She did their bidding, yet grown faint and pale
She shrank away and strove her arms to veil
In her gown's bosom, and to hide from them
Her little feet within her garment's hem;
But mocking her, they brought her thence away,
And led her forth into the light of day,
And brought her to a marble cloister fair
Where sat the queen on her adorned chair,
But she, as down the sun-streaked place they came,
Cried out, "Haste! ye, who lead my grief and shame."
And when she stood before her trembling, said,
"Although within a palace thou wast bred
Yet dost thou carry but a slavish heart,
And fitting is it thou shouldst learn thy part,
And know the state whereunto thou art brought;
Now, heed what yesterday thy folly taught,

And set thyself to-day my will to do;
Ho ye, bring that which I commanded you."

Then forth came two, and each upon her back
Bore up with pain a huge half-bursten sack,
Which, setting down, they opened on the floor,
And from their hempen mouths a stream did pour
Of mingled seeds, and grain, peas, pulse, and wheat,
Poppies and millet, and coriander sweet,
And many another brought from far-off lands,
Which mingling more with swift and ready hands
They piled into a heap confused and great.
And then said Venus, rising from her seat,
"Slave, here I leave thee, but before the night
These mingled seeds thy hands shall set aright,
All laid in heaps, each after its own kind,
And if in any heap I chance to find
An alien seed; thou knowest since yesterday
How disobedient slaves the forfeit pay."
Therewith she turned and left the palace fair
And from its outskirts rose into the air,
And flew until beneath her lay the sea,
Then, looking on its green waves lovingly,
Somewhat she dropped, and low adown she flew
Until she reached the temple that she knew
Within a sunny bay of her fair isle.

But Psyche sadly labouring all the while
With hopeless heart felt the swift hours go by,

And knowing well what bitter mockery
Lay in that task, yet did she what she might
That something should be finished ere the night,
And she a little mercy yet might ask;
But the first hours of that long feverish task
Passed amid mocks; for oft the damsels came
About her, and made merry with her shame,
And laughed to see her trembling eagerness,
And how, with some small lappet of her dress,
She winnowed out the wheat, and how she bent
Over the millet, hopelessly intent;
And how she guarded well some tiny heap
But just begun, from their long raiments' sweep;
And how herself, with girt gown, carefully
She went betwixt the heaps that 'gan to lie
Along the floor; though they were small enow,
When shadows lengthened and the sun was low;
But at the last these left her labouring,
Not daring now to weep, lest some small thing
Should 'scape her blinded eyes, and soon far off
She heard the echoes of their careless scoff.

Longer the shades grew, quicker sank the sun,
Until at last the day was well-nigh done,
And every minute did she think to hear
The fair Queen's dreaded footsteps drawing near;
But Love, that moves the earth, and skies, and sea,
Beheld his old love in her misery,
And wrapped her heart in sudden gentle sleep;
And meanwhile caused unnumbered ants to creep

About her, and they wrought so busily
That all, ere sundown, was as it should be,
And homeward went again the kingless folk.
Bewildered with her joy again she woke,
But scarce had time the unseen hands to bless,
That thus had helped her utter feebleness,
Ere Venus came, fresh from the watery way,
Panting with all the pleasure of the day;
But when she saw the ordered heaps, her smile
Faded away, she cried out, "Base and vile
Thou art indeed, this labour fitteth thee;
But now I know thy feigned simplicity,
Thine inward cunning, therefore hope no more,
Since thou art furnished well with hidden lore,
To 'scape thy due reward, if any day
Without some task accomplished, pass away!"
So with a frown she passed on, muttering,
"Nought have I done, to-morrow a new thing."

So the next morning Psyche did they lead
Unto a terrace o'er a flowery mead,
Where Venus sat, hid from the young sun's rays,
Upon the fairest of all summer days;
She pointed o'er the meads as they drew nigh,
And said, "See how that stream goes glittering by,
And on its banks my golden sheep now pass,
Cropping sweet mouthfuls of the flowery grass;
If thou, O cunning slave, to-day art fain
To save thyself from well-remembered pain,

Put forth a little of thy hidden skill,
And with their golden fleece thy bosom fill;
Yet make no haste, but ere the sun is down
Cast it before my feet from out thy gown;
Surely thy labour is but light to-day."

Then sadly went poor Psyche on her way,
Wondering wherein the snare lay, for she knew
No easy thing it was she had to do;
Nor had she failed indeed to note the smile
Wherewith the goddess praised her for the guile
That she, unhappy, lacked so utterly.

Amidst these thoughts she crossed the flowery lea,
And came unto the glittering river's side;
And, seeing it was neither deep nor wide,
She drew her sandals off, and to the knee
Girt up her gown, and by a willow-tree
Went down into the water, and but sank
Up to mid-leg therein; but from the bank
She scarce had gone three steps, before a voice
Called out to her, "Stay, Psyche, and rejoice
That I am here to help thee, a poor reed,
The soother of the loving hearts that bleed,
The pourer forth of notes, that oft have made
The weak man strong, and the rash man afraid.

"Sweet child, when by me now thy dear foot trod,
I knew thee for the loved one of our god;
Then prithee take my counsel in good part;
Go to the shore again, and rest thine heart
In sleep awhile, until the sun get low,

And then across the river shalt thou go
And find these evil creatures sleeping fast,
And on the bushes whereby they have passed
Much golden wool; take what seems good to thee,
And ere the sun sets go back easily.
But if within that mead thou sett'st thy feet
While yet they wake, an ill death shalt thou meet,
For they are of a cursed man-hating race,
Bred by a giant in a lightless place."
But at these words soft tears filled Psyche's eyes
As hope of love within her heart did rise;
And when she saw she was not helpless yet
Her old desire she would not quite forget;
But turning back, upon the bank she lay
In happy dreams till nigh the end of day;
Then did she cross and gather of the wool,
And with her bosom and her gown-skirt full
Came back to Venus at the sun-setting;
But she afar off saw it glistering
And cried aloud, "Go, take the slave away,
And keep her safe for yet another day,
And on the morning will I think again
Of some fresh task, since with so little pain
She doeth what the gods find hard enow;
For since the winds were pleased this waif to blow
Unto my door, a fool I were indeed,
If I should fail to use her for my need."
So her they led away from that bright sun,
Now scarce more hopeful that the task was done,

Since by those bitter words she knew full well
Another tale the coming day would tell.

But the next morn upon a turret high,
Where the wind kissed her raiment lovingly,
Stood Venus waiting her; and when she came
She said, "O slave, thy city's very shame,
Lift up thy cunning eyes, and looking hence
Shalt thou behold betwixt these battlements,
A black and barren mountain set aloof
From the green hills, shaped like a palace roof.
Ten leagues from hence it lieth, toward the north,
And from its rocks a fountain welleth forth,
Black like itself, and floweth down its side,
And in a while part into Styx doth glide,
And part into Cocytus runs away;
Now coming thither by the end of day,
Fill me this ewer from the awful stream;
Such task a sorceress like thee will deem
A little matter; bring it not to pass,
And if thou be not made of steel or brass,
To-morrow shalt thou find the bitterest day
Thou yet hast known, and all be sport and play
To what thy heart in that hour shall endure—
Behold, I swear it, and my word is sure!"
She turned therewith to go down toward the sea,
To meet her lover, who from Thessaly
Was come from some well-foughten field of war.

But Psyche, wandering wearily afar,
Reached the bare foot of that black rock at last,
And sat there grieving for the happy past,
For surely now, she thought, no help could be,
She had but reached the final misery,
Nor had she any counsel but to weep.
For not alone the place was very steep,
And craggy beyond measure, but she knew
What well it was that she was driven to,
The dreadful water that the gods swear by,
For there on either hand, as one draws nigh,
Are long-necked dragons ready for the spring,
And many another monstrous nameless thing,
The very sight of which is well-nigh death;
Then the black water as it goes crieth,
"Fly, wretched one, before you come to die!
Die, wretched man! I will not let you fly!
How have you heart to come before me here?
You have no heart, your life is turned to fear!"
Till the wretch falls adown with whirling brain,
And far below the sharp rocks end his pain.
Well then might Psyche wail her wretched fate,
And strive no more, but sitting weep and wait
Alone in that black land for kindly death,
With weary sobbing, wasting life and breath;
But o'er her head there flew the bird of Jove,
The bearer of his servant, friend of Love,
Who, when he saw her, straightway towards her flew,
And asked her why she wept, and when he knew,

And who she was, he said, "Cease all thy fear,
For to the black waves I thy ewer will bear,
And fill it for thee; but, remember me,
When thou art come unto thy majesty."
Then straight he flew, and through the dragon's wings
Went carelessly, nor feared their clatterings,
But set the ewer, filled, in her right hand,
And on that day saw many another land.

Then Psyche through the night toiled back again,
And as she went, she thought, "Ah! all is vain,
For though once more I just escape indeed,
Yet hath she many another wile at need;
And to these days when I my life first learn,
With unavailing longing shall I turn,
When this that seemeth now so horrible
Shall then seem but the threshold of her hell.
Alas! what shall I do? for even now
In sleep I see her pitiless white brow,
And hear the dreadful sound of her commands,
While with my helpless body and bound hands
I tremble underneath the cruel whips;
And oft for dread of her, with quivering lips
I wake, and waking know the time draws nigh
When nought shall wake me from that misery—
Behold, O Love, because of thee I live,
Because of thee, with these things still I strive."

NOW with the risen sun her weary feet
The late-strewn roses of the floor did meet
Upon the marble threshold of the place;
But she being brought before the matchless face,
Fresh with the new life of another day,
Beheld her wondering, for the goddess lay
With half-shut eyes upon her golden bed,
And when she entered scarcely turned her head,
But smiling spake, "The gods are good to thee,
Nor shalt thou always be mine enemy;
But one more task I charge thee with to-day,
For unto Proserpine take thou thy way,
And give this golden casket to her hands,
And pray the fair Queen of the gloomy lands
To fill the void shell with that beauty rare
That long ago as queen did set her there;
Nor needest thou to fail in this new thing,
Who hast to-day the heart and wit to bring
This dreadful water, and return alive;
And, that thou may'st the more in this thing strive,
If thou returnest I will show at last
My kindness unto thee, and all the past
Shalt thou remember as an ugly dream."
And now at first to Psyche did it seem
Her heart was softening to her, and the thought
Swelled her full heart to sobbing, and it brought
Into her yearning eyes half-happy tears:

But on her way cold thoughts and dreadful fears
Rose in her heart, for who indeed could teach
A living soul that dread abode to reach
And yet return? and then once more it seemed
The hope of mercy was but lightly dreamed,
And she remembered that triumphant smile,
And needs must think, "This is the final wile,
Alas! what trouble must a goddess take
So weak a thing as this poor heart to break.
"See now this tower! from off its top will I
Go quick to Proserpine—ah, good to die!
Rather than hear those shameful words again,
And bear that unimaginable pain
She has been treasuring up against this day!
O Love, farewell, thou seest all hope is dead,
Thou seest what torments on my wretched head
Thy bitter mother doth not cease to heap;
Farewell, O Love, for thee and life I weep.
Alas, my foolish heart! alas, my sin!
Alas, for all the love I could not win!"

Now was this tower both old enough and grey,
Built by some king forgotten many a day,
And no man dwelt there, now that bitter war
From that bright land had long been driven afar;
There now she entered, trembling and afraid;
But 'neath her doubtful steps the dust long laid
In utter rest, rose up into the air,
And wavered in the wind that down the stair

Rushed to the door; then she drew back a pace,
Moved by the coldness of the lonely place
That for so long had seen no ray of sun.
Then shuddering did she hear these words begun,
Like a wind's moaning voice, "Have thou no fear
The hollow words of one long slain to hear!
Thou livest, and thy hope is not yet dead,
And if thou heedest me, thou well may'st tread
The road to hell, and yet return again.
"For thou must go o'er many a hill and plain
Until to Sparta thou art come at last,
And when the ancient city thou hast passed
A mountain shalt thou reach, that men now call
Great Tænarus, that riseth like a wall
'Twixt plain and upland, therein shalt thou find
The wide mouth of a cavern huge and blind,
Wherein there cometh never any sun,
Whose dreadful darkness all things living shun;
This shun thou not, but yet take care to have
Three honey-cakes thy soul alive to save,
And in thy mouth a piece of money set,
Then through the dark go boldly, and forget
The stories thou hast heard of death and hell,
And heed my words, and then shall all be well.
"For when thou hast passed through that cavern blind,
A place of dim grey meadows shalt thou find,
Wherethrough to inmost hell a path doth lead,
Which follow thou, with diligence and heed;

For as thou goest there, thou soon shalt see
Two men like peasants loading painfully
A fallen ass; these unto thee will call
To help them, but give thou no heed at all,
But pass them swiftly; and then soon again
Within a shed three crones shalt thou see plain
Busily weaving, who shall bid thee leave
The road and fill their shuttles while they weave,
But slacken not thy steps for all their prayers,
For these are shadows only, and set snares.

"At last thou comest to a water wan,
And at the bank shall be the ferryman
Surly and grey; and when he asketh thee
Of money for thy passage, hastily
Show him thy mouth, and straight from off thy lip
The money he will take, and in his snip
Embark thee and set forward; but beware.
For on thy passage is another snare
From out the waves a grisly head shall come,
Most like thy father thou hast left at home,
And pray for passage long and piteously,
But on thy life of him have no pity,
Else art thou lost; also thy father lives,
And in the temples of the high gods gives
Great daily gifts for thy returning home.

"When thou unto the other side art come,
A palace shalt thou see of fiery gold,
And by the door thereof shalt thou behold
An ugly triple monster, that shall yell

For thine undoing; now behold him well,
And into each mouth of him cast a cake,
And no more heed of thee then shall he take,
And thou mayst pass into a glorious hall
Where many a wonder hangs upon the wall;
But far more wonderful than anything
The fair slim consort of the gloomy King,
Arrayed all royally shalt thou behold,
Who sitting on a carven throne of gold,
Whene'er thou enterest shall rise up to thee,
And bid thee welcome there most lovingly,
And pray thee on a royal bed to sit,
And share her feast; yet eat thou not of it,
But sitting on the ground eat bread alone,
Then do thy message kneeling by her throne;
And when thou hast the gift, return with speed;
The sleepy dog of thee shall take no heed,
The ferryman shall bear thee on thy way
Without more words, and thou shalt see the day
Unharmed if that dread box thou openest not;
But if thou dost, then death shall be thy lot.

"O beautiful, when safe thou com'st again,
Remember me, who lie here in such pain
Unburied; set me in some tomb of stone.
When thou hast gathered every little bone;
But never shalt thou set thereon a name,
Because my ending was with grief and shame,
Who was a Queen like thee long years agone,

And in this tower so long have lain alone."

Then, pale and full of trouble, Psyche went
Bearing the casket, and her footsteps bent
To Lacedæmon, and thence found her way
To Tænarus, and there the golden day
For that dark cavern did she leave behind;
Then, going boldly through it, did she find
The shadowy meads which that wide way ran through,
Under a seeming sky 'twixt grey and blue;
No wind blew there, there was no bird or tree,
Or beast, and dim grey flowers she did but see
That never faded in that changeless place,
And if she had but seen a living face
Most strange and bright she would have thought it there,
Or if her own face, troubled yet so fair,
The still pools by the road-side could have shown
The dimness of that place she might have known;
But their dull surface cast no image back,
For all but dreams of light that land did lack.
So on she passed, still noting every thing,
Nor yet had she forgotten there to bring
The honey-cakes and money: in a while
She saw those shadows striving hard to pile
The bales upon the ass, and heard them call,
"O woman, help us! for our skill is small
And we are feeble in this place indeed;"
But swiftly did she pass, nor gave them heed,
Though after her from far their cries they sent.

Then a long way adown that road she went,
Not seeing aught, till, as the Shade had said,
She came upon three women in a shed
Busily weaving, who cried, "Daughter, leave
The beaten road a while, and as we weave
Fill thou our shuttles with these endless threads,
For here our eyes are sleepy, and our heads
Are feeble in this miserable place."
But for their words she did but mend her pace,
Although her heart beat quick as she passed by.

Then on she went, until she could espy
The wan, grey river lap the leaden bank
Wherefrom there sprouted sparsely sedges rank,
And there the road had end in that sad boat
Wherein the dead men unto Minos float;
There stood the ferryman, who now, seeing her, said,
"O living soul, that thus among the dead
Hast come, on whatso errand, without fear,
Know thou that penniless none passes here;
Of all the coins that rich men have on earth
To buy the dreadful folly they call mirth,
But one they keep when they have passed the grave
That o'er this stream a passage they may have;
And thou, though living, art but dead to me,
Who here, immortal, see mortality
Pass, stripped of this last thing that men desire
Unto the changeless meads or changeless fire."
Speechless she shewed the money on her lip

Which straight he took, and set her in the ship,
And then the wretched, heavy oars he threw
Into the rowlocks and the flood they drew;
Silent, with eyes that looked beyond her face,
He laboured, and they left the dreary place.
But midmost of that water did arise
A dead man, pale, with ghastly staring eyes
That somewhat like her father still did seem,
But in such wise as figures in a dream;
Then with a lamentable voice it cried,
"O daughter, I am dead, and in this tide
For ever shall I drift, an unnamed thing,
Who was thy father once, a mighty king,
Unless thou takest pity on me now,
And bidd'st the ferryman turn here his prow,
That I with thee to some abode may cross;
And little unto thee will be the loss,
And unto me the gain will be to come
To such a place as I may call a home,
Being now but dead and empty of delight,
And set in this sad place 'twixt dark and light."
Now at these words the tears ran down apace
For memory of the once familiar face,
And those old days, wherein, a little child
'Twixt awe and love beneath those eyes she smiled;
False pity moved her very heart, although
The guile of Venus she failed not to know,
But tighter round the casket clasped her hands,
And shut her eyes, remembering the commands

Of that dead queen: so safe to land she came.

And there in that grey country, like a flame
Before her eyes rose up the house of gold,
And at the gate she met the beast threefold,
Who ran to meet her open-mouthed, but she
Unto his jaws the cakes cast cunningly,
But trembling much; then on the ground he lay
Lolling his heads, and let her go her way;
And so she came into the mighty hall,
And saw those wonders hanging on the wall,
That all with pomegranates was covered o'er
In memory of the meal on this sad shore,
Whereby fair Enna was bewept in vain,
And this became a kingdom and a chain.

But on a throne, the Queen of all the dead
She saw therein with gold-embraced head,
In royal raiment, beautiful and pale;
Then with slim hands her face did Psyche veil
In worship of her, who said, "Welcome here,
O messenger of Venus! thou art dear
To me thyself indeed, for of thy grace
And loveliness we know e'en in this place;
Rest thee then, fair one, on this royal bed
And with some dainty food shalt thou be fed;
Ho, ye who wait, bring in the tables now!"

Therewith were brought things glorious of show
On cloths and tables royally beseen,
By damsels each one fairer than a queen,

The very latchets of whose shoes were worth
The royal crown of any queen on earth;
But when upon them Psyche looked, she saw
That all these dainty matters without flaw
Were strange of shape and of strange-blended hues,
So every cup and plate did she refuse
Those lovely hands brought to her, and she said,
"O Queen, to me amidst my awe and dread
These things are nought, my message is not done,
So let me rest upon this cold grey stone,
And while my eyes no higher than thy feet
Are lifted, eat the food that mortals eat."

Therewith upon the floor she sat her down
And from the folded bosom of her gown
Drew forth her bread and ate, while with cold eyes
Regarding her 'twixt anger and surprise,
The queen sat silent for awhile, then spoke,
"Why art thou here, wisest of living folk?
Depart in haste, lest thou shouldst come to be
Thyself a helpless thing and shadowy!
Give me the casket then, thou need'st not say
Wherefore thou thus hast passed the awful way;
Bide there, and for thy mistress shalt thou have
The charm that beauty from all change can save."

Then Psyche rose, and from her trembling hand
Gave her the casket, and awhile did stand
Alone within the hall, that changing light
From burning streams, and shadowy waves of night
Made strange and dread, till to her, standing there

The world began to seem no longer fair,
Life no more to be hoped for, but that place
The peaceful goal of all the hurrying race,
The house she must return to on some day.
Then sighing scarcely could she turn away
When with the casket came the queen once more,
And said, "Haste now to leave this shadowy shore
Before thou changest; even now I see
Thine eyes are growing strange, thou look'st on me
E'en as the linnet looks upon the snake.
Behold, thy wisely-guarded treasure take,
And let thy breath of life no longer move
The shadows with the memories of past love."

But Psyche at that name, with quickened heart
Turned eagerly, and hastened to depart
Bearing that burden, hoping for the day;
Harmless, asleep, the triple monster lay,
The ferryman did set her in his boat
Unquestioned, and together did they float
Over the leaden water back again:
Nor saw she more those women bent with pain
Over their weaving, or the fallen ass,
But swiftly up the grey road did she pass
And well-nigh now was come into the day
By hollow Tænarus, but o'er the way
The wings of Envy brooded all unseen;
Because indeed the cruel and fair Queen
Knew well how she had sped; so in her breast,

Against the which the dreadful box was pressed,
Grew up at last this foolish, harmful thought.
"Behold how far this beauty I have brought
To give unto my bitter enemy;
Might I not still a very goddess be
If this were mine which goddesses desire;
Yea, what if this hold swift consuming fire,
Why do I think it good for me to live,
That I my body once again may give
Into her cruel hands—come death! come life!
And give me end to all the bitter strife!"
Therewith down by the wayside did she sit
And turned the box round, long regarding it;
But at the last, with trembling hands, undid
The clasp, and fearfully raised up the lid;
But what was there she saw not, for her head
Fell back, and nothing she remembered
Of all her life, yet nought of rest she had,
The hope of which makes hapless mortals glad;
For while her limbs were sunk in deadly sleep
Most like to death, over her heart 'gan creep
Ill dreams; so that for fear and great distress
She would have cried, but in her helplessness
Could open not her mouth, or frame a word;
Although the threats of mocking things she heard,
And seemed, amidst new forms of horror bound,
To watch strange endless armies moving round,
With all their sleepless eyes still fixed on her,
Who from that changeless place should never stir.

Moveless she lay, and in that dreadful sleep
Scarce had the strength some few slow tears to weep.

And there she would have lain for evermore,
A marble image on the shadowy shore
In outward seeming, but within oppressed
With torments, knowing neither hope nor rest
But as she lay the Phœnix flew along
Going to Egypt, and knew all her wrong,
And pitied her, beholding her sweet face,
And flew to Love and told him of her case;
And Love in guerdon of the tale he told,
Changed all the feathers of his neck to gold,
And he flew on to Egypt glad at heart.
But Love himself gat swiftly for his part
To rocky Tænarus, and found her there
Laid half a furlong from the outer air.

But at that sight out burst the smothered flame
Of love, when he remembered all her shame,
The stripes, the labour, and the wretched fear,
And kneeling down he whispered in her ear,
"Rise, Psyche, and be mine for evermore,
For evil is long tarrying on this shore."
Then when she heard him, straightway she arose,
And from her fell the burden of her woes;
And yet her heart within her well-nigh broke,
When she from grief to happiness awoke;
And loud her sobbing was in that grey place,

And with sweet shame she covered up her face.
But her dear hands, all wet with tears, he kissed,
And taking them about each little wrist
Drew them away, and in a sweet voice said,
"Raise up again, O Psyche, that dear head,
And of thy simpleness have no more shame;
Thou hast been tried, and cast away all blame
Into the sea of woes that thou didst bear,
The bitter pain, the hopelessness, the fear—
Holpen a little, loved with boundless love
Amidst them all—but now the shadows move
Fast toward the west, earth's day is well-nigh done,
One toil thou hast yet; by to-morrow's sun
Kneel the last time before my mother's feet,
Thy task accomplished; and my heart, O sweet,
Shall go with thee to ease thy toilsome way:
Farewell awhile! but that so glorious day
I promised thee of old, now cometh fast,
When even hope thy soul aside shall cast,
Amidst the joy that thou shalt surely win."
So saying, all that sleep he shut within
The dreadful casket, and aloft he flew,
But slowly she unto the cavern drew
Scarce knowing if she dreamed, and so she came
Unto the earth where yet the sun did flame
Low down between the pine-trunks, tall and red,
And with its last beams kissed her golden head.

WITH what words Love unto the Father prayed
I know not, nor what deeds the balance weighed;
But this I know, that he prayed not in vain,
And Psyche's life the heavenly crown shall gain;
So round about the messenger was sent
To tell immortals of their King's intent,
And bid them gather to the Father's hall.
But while they got them ready at his call,
On through the night was Psyche toiling still,
To whom no pain nor weariness seemed ill
Since now once more she knew herself beloved;
But when the unresting world again had moved
Round into golden day, she came again
To that fair place where she had borne such pain,
And flushed and joyful in despite her fear,
Unto the goddess did she draw anear,
And knelt adown before her golden seat,
Laying the fatal casket at her feet;
Then at the first no word the Sea-born said,
But looked afar over her golden head,
Pondering upon the mighty deeds of fate;
While Psyche still, as one who well may wait,
Knelt, calm and motionless, nor said a word,
But ever thought of her sweet lovesome lord.
At last the Queen said, "Girl, I bid thee rise,
For now hast thou found favour in mine eyes;

And I repent me of the misery
That in this place thou hast endured of me,
Although because of it, thy joy indeed
Shall now be more, that pleasure is thy meed."
Then bending, on the forehead did she kiss
Fair Psyche, who turned red for shame and bliss;
But Venus smiled again on her, and said,
"Go now, and bathe, and be as well arrayed
As thou shouldst be, to sit beside my son;
I think thy life on earth is well-nigh done."

So thence once more was Psyche led away,
And cast into no prison on that day,
But brought unto a bath beset with flowers,
Made dainty with a fount's sweet-smelling showers,
And there being bathed, e'en in such fair attire
As veils the glorious Mother of Desire
Her limbs were veiled, then in the wavering shade,
Amidst the sweetest garden was she laid,
And while the damsels round her watch did keep,
At last she closed her weary eyes in sleep,
And woke no more to earth, for ere the day
Had yet grown late, once more asleep she lay
Within the West Wind's mighty arms, nor woke
Until the light of heaven upon her broke,
And on her trembling lips she felt the kiss
Of very Love, and mortal yet, for bliss
Must fall a-weeping still. Ah, me! that I,
Who late have told her woe and misery,

Must leave untold the joy unspeakable
That on her tender wounded spirit fell!
Alas! I try to think of it in vain,
My lyre is but attuned to tears and pain,
How shall I sing the never-ending day?

Led by the hand of Love she took her way
Unto a vale beset with heavenly trees,
Where all the gathered gods and goddesses
Abode her coming; but when Psyche saw
The Father's face, she fainting with her awe
Had fallen, but that Love's arm held her up.
Then brought the cup-bearer a golden cup,
And gently set it in her slender hand,
And while in dread and wonder she did stand,
The Father's awful voice smote on her ear,
"Drink now, O beautiful, and have no fear!
For with this draught shalt thou be born again,
And live for ever free from care and pain."

Then, pale as privet, took she heart to drink,
And therewithal most strange new thoughts did think,
And unknown feelings seized her, and there came
Sudden remembrance, vivid as a flame,
Of everything that she had done on earth,
Although it all seemed changed in weight and worth,
Small things becoming great, and great things small;
And godlike pity touched her therewithal
For her old self, for sons of men that die;

And that sweet new-born immortality
Now with full love her rested spirit fed.

Then in that concourse did she lift her head,
And stood at last a very goddess there,
And all cried out at seeing her grown so fair.

So while in heaven quick passed the time away,
About the ending of that lovely day,
Bright shone the low sun over all the earth
For joy of such a wonderful new birth.

OR e'er his tale was done, night held the earth;
Yea, the brown bird grown bold, as sounds of mirth
Grew faint and scanty, now his tale had done,
And by his mate abode the next day's sun;
And in those old hearts did the story move
Remembrance of the mighty deeds of love,
And with these thoughts did hopes of life arise,
Till tears unseen were in their ancient eyes,
And in their yearning hearts unspoken prayers,
And idle seemed the world with all its cares.

Few words they said; the balmy odorous wind
Wandered about, some resting-place to find;
The young leaves rustled 'neath its gentle breath,
And here and there some blossom burst his sheath,
Adding unnoticed fragrance to the night;
But, as they pondered, a new golden light
Streamed over the green garden, and they heard
Sweet voices sing some ancient poet's word
In praise of May, and then in sight there came
The minstrels' figures underneath the flame
Of scented torches passing 'twixt the trees,
And soon the dusky hall grew bright with these,
And therewithal they put all thought away,
And midst the tinkling harps drank deep to May.

THROUGH many changes had the May-tide passed,
The hope of summer oft had been o'ercast,
Ere midst the gardens they once more were met;
But now the full-leaved trees might well forget
The changeful agony of doubtful spring,
For summer pregnant with so many a thing
Was at the door; right hot had been the day
Which they amid the trees had passed away,
And now betwixt the tulip beds they went
Unto the hall, and thoughts of days long spent
Gathered about them, as some blossom's smell
Unto their hearts familiar tales did tell.

But when they well were settled in the hall,
And now behind the trees the sun 'gan fall,
And they as yet no history had heard,
Laurence, the Swabian priest, took up the word,
And said, "Ye know from what has gone before,
That in my youth I followed mystic lore,
And many books I read in seeking it,
And through my memory this same eve doth flit
A certain tale I found in one of these,
Long ere mine eyes had looked upon the seas;
It made me shudder in the times gone by,
When I believed in many a mystery
I thought divine, that now I think, forsooth,
Men's own fears made, to fill the place of truth
Within their foolish hearts; short is the tale,
And therefore will the better now avail
To fill the space before the night comes on,
And unto rest once more the world is won.

THE WRITING ON THE IMAGE.

ARGUMENT.

How on an Image that stood anciently in Rome were written certain words, which none understood, until a Scholar, coming there, knew their meaning, and thereby discovered great marvels, but withal died miserably.

IN half-forgotten days of old,
As by our fathers we were told,
Within the town of Rome there stood
An image cut of cornel wood,
And on the upraised hand of it
Men might behold these letters writ—
"PERCUTE HIC:" which is to say,
In that tongue that we speak to-day,
"*Strike here!*" nor yet did any know
The cause why this was written so.

Thus in the middle of the square,
In the hot sun and summer air,
The snow-drift and the driving rain,
That image stood, with little pain,
For twice a hundred years and ten;

While many a band of striving men
Were driven betwixt woe and mirth
Swiftly across the weary earth,
From nothing unto dark nothing:
And many an Emperor and King,
Passing with glory or with shame,
Left little record of his name,
And no remembrance of the face
Once watched with awe for gifts or grace.
Fear little, then, I counsel you,
What any son of man can do;
Because a log of wood will last
While many a life of man goes past,
And all is over in short space.

Now so it chanced that to this place
There came a man of Sicily,
Who when the image he did see,
Knew full well who, in days of yore,
Had set it there; for much strange lore,
In Egypt and in Babylon,
This man with painful toil had won;
And many secret things could do;
So verily full well he knew
That master of all sorcery
Who wrought the thing in days gone by,
And doubted not that some great spell
It guarded, but could nowise tell
What it might be. So, day by day,

Still would he loiter on the way,
And watch the image carefully,
Well mocked of many a passer-by.
And on a day he stood and gazed
Upon the slender finger, raised
Against a doubtful cloudy sky,
Nigh noontide; and thought, "Certainly
The master who made thee so fair
By wondrous art, had not stopped there,
But made thee speak, had he not thought
That thereby evil might be brought
Upon his spell." But as he spoke,
From out a cloud the noon sun broke
With watery light, and shadows cold:
Then did the Scholar well behold
How, from that finger carved to tell
Those words, a short black shadow fell
Upon a certain spot of ground,
And thereon, looking all around
And seeing none heeding, went straightway
Whereas the finger's shadow lay,
And with his knife about the place
A little circle did he trace;
Then home he turned with throbbing head,
And forthright gat him to his bed,
And slept until the night was late
And few men stirred from gate to gate.
So when at midnight he did wake,
Pickaxe and shovel did he take,

And, going to that now silent square,
He found the mark his knife made there,
And quietly with many a stroke
The pavement of the place he broke:
And so, the stones being set apart,
He 'gan to dig with beating heart,
And from the hole in haste he cast
The marl and gravel; till at last,
Full shoulder high, his arms were jarred,
For suddenly his spade struck hard
With clang against some metal thing:
And soon he found a brazen ring,
All green with rust, twisted, and great
As a man's wrist, set in a plate
Of copper, wrought all curiously
With words unknown though plain to see,
Spite of the rust; and flowering trees,
And beasts, and wicked images,
Whereat he shuddered: for he knew
What ill things he might come to do,
If he should still take part with these
And that Great Master strive to please.
  But small time had he then to stand
And think, so straight he set his hand
Unto the ring, but where he thought
That by main strength it must be brought
From out its place, lo! easily
It came away, and let him see
A winding staircase wrought of stone,

Wherethrough the new-come wind did moan.
Then thought he, "If I come alive,
From out this place well shall I thrive,
For I may look here certainly
The treasures of a king to see,
A mightier man than men are now.
So in few days what man shall know
The needy Scholar, seeing me
Great in the place where great men be,
The richest man in all the land?
Beside the best then shall I stand,
And some unheard-of palace have;
And if my soul I may not save
In heaven, yet here in all men's eyes
Will I make some sweet paradise,
With marble cloisters, and with trees
And bubbling wells, and fantasies,
And things all men deem strange and rare,
And crowds of women kind and fair,
That I may see, if so I please,
Laid on the flowers, or mid the trees
With half-clad bodies wandering.
There, dwelling happier than the king,
What lovely days may yet be mine!
How shall I live with love and wine,
And music, till I come to die!
And then —— Who knoweth certainly
What haps to us when we are dead?
Truly I think by likelihead

Nought haps to us of good or bad;
Therefore on earth will I be glad
A short space, free from hope or fear;
And fearless will I enter here
And meet my fate, whatso it be."

Now on his back a bag had he,
To bear what treasure he might win,
And therewith now did he begin
To go adown the winding stair;
And found the walls all painted fair
With images of many a thing,
Warrior and priest, and queen and king,
But nothing knew what they might be.
Which things full clearly could he see,
For lamps were hung up here and there
Of strange device, but wrought right fair,
And pleasant savour came from them.
At last a curtain, on whose hem
Unknown words in red gold were writ,
He reached, and softly raising it
Stepped back, for now did he behold
A goodly hall hung round with gold,
And at the upper end could see
Sitting, a glorious company:
Therefore he trembled, thinking well
They were no men, but fiends of hell.
But while he waited, trembling sore,
And doubtful of his late-learned lore,

A cold blast of the outer air
Blew out the lamps upon the stair
And all was dark behind him; then
Did he fear less to face those men
Than, turning round, to leave them there
While he went groping up the stair.
Yea, since he heard no cry or call
Or any speech from them at all,
He doubted they were images
Set there some dying king to please
By that Great Master of the art;
Therefore at last with stouter heart
He raised the cloth and entered in
In hope that happy life to win,
And drawing nigher did behold
That these were bodies dead and cold
Attired in full royal guise,
And wrought by art in such a wise
That living they all seemed to be,
Whose very eyes he well could see,
That now beheld not foul or fair,
Shining as though alive they were.
And midmost of that company
An ancient king that man could see,
A mighty man, whose beard of grey
A foot over his gold gown lay;
And next beside him sat his queen
Who in a flowery gown of green
And golden mantle well was clad,

And on her neck a collar had
Too heavy for her dainty breast;
Her loins by such a belt were prest
That whoso in his treasury
Held that alone, a king might be.
On either side of these, a lord
Stood heedfully before the board,
And in their hands held bread and wine
For service; behind these did shine
The armour of the guards, and then
The well-attired serving-men,
The minstrels clad in raiment meet;
And over against the royal seat
Was hung a lamp, although no flame
Was burning there, but there was set
Within its open golden fret
A huge carbuncle, red and bright;
Wherefrom there shone forth such a light
That great hall was as clear by it,
As though by wax it had been lit,
As some great church at Easter-tide.
Now set a little way aside,
Six paces from the daïs stood
An image made of brass and wood,
In likeness of a full armed knight
Who pointed 'gainst the ruddy light
A huge shaft ready in a bow.
Pondering how he could come to know
What all these marvellous matters meant,

About the hall the scholar went,
Trembling, though nothing moved as yet;
And for awhile did he forget
The longings that had brought him there
In wondering at these marvels fair;
And still for fear he doubted much
One jewel of their robes to touch.

But as about the hall he passed
He grew more used to them at last,
And thought, "Swiftly the time goes by,
And now no doubt the day draws nigh
Folk will be stirring: by my head
A fool I am to fear the dead,
Who have seen living things enow,
Whose very names no man can know,
Whose shapes brave men might well affright
More than the lion in the night
Wandering for food;" therewith he drew
Unto those royal corpses two,
That on dead brows still wore the crown;
And midst the golden cups set down
The rugged wallet from his back,
Patched of strong leather, brown and black.
Then, opening wide its mouth, took up
From off the board, a golden cup
The King's dead hand was laid upon,
Whose unmoved eyes upon him shone
And recked no more of that last shame

Than if he were the beggar lame;
Who in old days was wont to wait
For a dog's meal beside the gate.
Of which shame nought our man did reck,
But laid his hand upon the neck
Of the slim Queen, and thence undid
The jewelled collar, that straight slid
Down her smooth bosom to the board.
And when these matters he had stored
Safe in his sack, with both their crowns,
The jewelled parts of their rich gowns,
Their shoes and belts, brooches and rings,
And cleared the board of all rich things,
He staggered with them down the hall.
But as he went his eyes did fall
Upon a wonderful green stone,
Upon the hall-floor laid alone;
He said, "Though thou art not so great
To add by much unto the weight
Of this my sack indeed, yet thou,
Certes, would make me rich enow,
That verily with thee I might
Wage one-half of the world to fight
The other half of it, and I
The lord of all the world might die;—
I will not leave thee;" therewithal
He knelt down midmost of the hall,
Thinking it would come easily
Into his hand; but when that he

Gat hold of it, full fast it stack,
So fuming, down he laid his sack,
And with both hands pulled lustily,
But as he strained, he cast his eye
Unto the daïs, and saw there
The image who the great bow bare
Moving the bowstring to his ear,
So, shrieking out aloud for fear,
Of that rich stone he loosed his hold
And catching up his bag of gold,
Gat to his feet: but ere he stood
The evil thing of brass and wood
Up to his ear the notches drew;
And clanging forth the arrow flew,
And midmost of the carbuncle
Clanging again, the forked barbs fell,
And all was dark as pitch straightway.

So there until the judgment day
Shall come and find his bones laid low,
And raise them up for weal or woe,
This man must bide; cast down he lay
While all his past life day by day
In one short moment he could see
Laid out before him, while that he
In terror by that fatal stone
Was laid, and scarcely dared to moan.
But in a while his hope returned,
And then, though nothing he discerned,

He gat him up upon his feet,
And all about the walls he beat
To find some token of the door,
But never could he find it more,
For by some dreadful sorcery
All was sealed close as it might be,
And midst the marvels of that hall
This scholar found the end of all.

But in the town on that same night,
An hour before the dawn of light,
Such storm upon the place there fell,
That not the oldest man could tell
Of such another: and thereby
The image was burnt utterly,
Being stricken from the clouds above;
And folk deemed that same bolt did move
The pavement where that wretched one
Unto his foredoomed fate had gone,
Because the plate was set again
Into its place, and the great rain
Washed the earth down, and sorcery
Had hid the place where it did lie.
So soon the stones were set all straight,
But yet the folk, afraid of fate,
Where once the man of cornel wood
Through many a year of bad and good
Had kept his place, set up alone
Great Jove himself, cut in white stone,

But thickly overlaid with gold.
"Which," saith my tale, "you may behold
Unto this day, although indeed
Some Lord or other, being in need,
Took every ounce of gold away."
But now, this tale in some past day
Being writ, I warrant all is gone,
Both gold and weather-beaten stone.

Be merry, masters, while ye may,
For men much quicker pass away.

THEY praised the tale, and for awhile they talked
Of other tales of treasure-seekers balked,
And shame and loss for men insatiate stored,
Nitocris' tomb, the Niflungs' fatal hoard,
The serpent-guarded treasures of the dead;
Then of how men would be remembered
When they are gone; and more than one could tell
Of what unhappy things therefrom befel;
Or how by folly men have gained a name;
A name indeed, not hallowed by the fame
Of any deeds remembered: and some thought,—
'Strange hopes and fears for what shall be but nought
To dead men! better it would be to give
What things they may, while on the earth they live
Unto the earth, and from the bounteous earth
To take their pay of sorrow or of mirth,
Hatred or love, and get them on their way;
And let the teeming earth fresh troubles make
For other men, and ever for their sake
Use what they left, when they are gone from it.'

But while amid such musings they did sit,
Dark night being come, men lighted up the hall,
And the chief man for minstrelsy did call,
And other talk their dull thoughts chased away,
Nor did they part till night was mixed with day.

JUNE.

O JUNE, O June, that we desired so,
Wilt thou not make us happy on this day?
Across the river thy soft breezes blow
Sweet with the scent of beanfields far away,
Above our heads rustle the aspens grey,
Calm is the sky with harmless clouds beset,
No thought of storm the morning vexes yet.

See, we have left our hopes and fears behind
To give our very hearts up unto thee;
What better place than this then could we find
By this sweet stream that knows not of the sea,
That guesses not the city's misery,
This little stream whose hamlets scarce have names,
This far-off, lonely mother of the Thames?

Here then, O June, thy kindness will we take;
And if indeed but pensive men we seem,
What should we do? thou wouldst not have us wake
From out the arms of this rare happy dream,
And wish to leave the murmur of the stream,
The rustling boughs, the twitter of the birds,
And all thy thousand peaceful happy words.

NOW in the early June they deemed it good
That they should go unto a house that stood
On their chief river, so upon a day
With favouring wind and tide they took their way
Up the fair stream; most lovely was the time
Even amidst the days of that fair clime,
And still the wanderers thought about their lives,
And that desire that rippling water gives
To youthful hearts to wander anywhere.

So midst sweet sights and sounds a house most fair
They came to, set upon the river side
Where kindly folk their coming did abide;
There they took land, and in the lime-trees' shade
Beneath the trees they found the fair feast laid,
And sat, well pleased; but when the water-hen
Had got at last to think them harmless men,
And they with rest, and pleasure, and old wine,
Began to feel immortal and divine,
An elder spoke, "O gentle friends, the day
Amid such calm delight now slips away,
And ye yourselves are grown so bright and glad
I care not if I tell you something sad;
Sad, though the life I tell you of passed by,
Unstained by sordid strife or misery;
Sad, because though a glorious end it tells
Yet on the end of glorious life it dwells,
And striving through all things to reach the best
Upon no midway happiness will rest."

THE LOVE OF ALCESTIS.

ARGUMENT.

ADMETUS, king of Pheræ in Thessaly, received unwittingly Apollo as his servant, by the help of whom he won to wife Alcestis, daughter of Pelias: afterwards too, as in other things, so principally in this, Apollo gave him help, that when he came to die, he obtained of the Fates for him, that if another would die willingly in his stead, then he should live still; and when to every one else this seemed impossible, Alcestis gave her life for her husband's.

MIDST sunny grass-clad meads that slope adown
To lake Bœbeis stands an ancient town,
Where dwelt of old a lord of Thessaly,
The son of Pheres and fair Clymene,
Who had to name Admetus: long ago
The dwellers by the lake have ceased to know
His name, because the world grows old, but then
He was accounted great among great men;
Young, strong, and godlike, lacking nought at all
Of gifts that unto royal men might fall
In those old simple days, before men went
To gather unseen harm and discontent,

Along with all the alien merchandize
That rich folk need, too restless to be wise.

Now on the fairest of all autumn eves,
When midst the dusty, crumpled, dying leaves
The black grapes showed, and every press and vat
Was newly scoured, this King Admetus sat
Among his people, wearied in such wise
By hopeful toil as makes a paradise
Of the rich earth; for light and far away
Seemed all the labour of the coming day,
And no man wished for more than then he had,
Nor with another's mourning was made glad.
There in the pillared porch, their supper done,
They watched the fair departing of the sun;
The while the soft-eyed well-girt maidens poured
The joy of life from out the jars long stored
Deep in the earth, while little like a king,
As we call kings, but glad with everything,
The wise Thessalian sat and blessed his life,
So free from sickening fear and foolish strife.
But midst the joy of this festivity,
Turning aside he saw a man draw nigh,
Along the dusty grey vine-bordered road
That had its ending at his fair abode;
He seemed e'en from afar to set his face
Unto the King's adorned reverend place,
And like a traveller went he wearily,
And yet as one who seems his rest to see.

A staff he bore, but nowise was he bent
With scrip or wallet; so withal he went
Straight to the King's high seat, and standing near,
Seemed a stout youth and noble, free from fear,
But peaceful and unarmed; and though ill clad,
And though the dust of that hot land he had
Upon his limbs and face, as fair was he
As any king's son you might lightly see,
Grey-eyed and crisp-haired, beautiful of limb,
And no ill eye the women cast on him.

But kneeling now, and stretching forth his hand,
He said, "O thou, the King of this fair land,
Unto a banished man some shelter give,
And help me with thy goods that I may live:
Thou hast good store, Admetus, yet may I,
Who kneel before thee now in misery,
Give thee more gifts before the end shall come
Than all thou hast laid safely in thy home."

"Rise up, and be my guest," Admetus said,
"I need no gifts for this poor gift of bread,
The land is wide, and bountiful enow.
What thou canst do, to-morrow thou shalt show,
And be my man, perchance; but this night rest
Not questioned more than any passing guest.
Yea, even if a great King thou hast spilt,
Thou shall not answer aught but as thou wilt."

Then the man rose and said, "O King, indeed
Of thine awarded silence have I need,
Nameless I am, nameless what I have done

Must be through many circles of the sun.
But for to-morrow—let me rather tell
On this same eve what things I can do well,
And let me put mine hand in thine and swear
To serve thee faithfully a changing year;
Nor think the woods of Ossa hold one beast
That of thy tenderest yearling shall make feast,
Whiles that I guard thy flocks, and thou shalt bear
Thy troubles easier when thou com'st to hear
The music I can make. Let these thy men
Witness against me if I fail thee, when
War falls upon thy lovely land and thee."

Then the King smiled, and said, "So let it be,
Well shalt thou serve me, doing far less than this,
Nor for thy service due gifts shalt thou miss:
Behold I take *thy faith with thy right hand,*
Be thou true man *unto this guarded land.*
Ho ye! take this my *guest, find raiment meet*
To clad him with, *and bathe his wearied feet,*
Then bring him back beside my throne to feast."

But to himself he said, "I am the least
Of all Thessalians if this man was born
In any earthly dwelling more forlorn
Than a king's palace."

Then a damsel slim
Let him inside, nought loth to go with him,
And when the cloud of steam had curled to meet
Within the brass his wearied dusty feet,
She from a carved press brought him linen fair,

And a new-woven coat a king might wear,
And so being clad he came unto the feast,
But as he came again, all people ceased
What talk they held soever, for they thought
A very god among them had been brought;
And doubly glad the king Admetus was
At what that dying eve had brought to pass,
And bade him sit by him and feast his fill.
So there they sat till all the world was still,
And 'twixt the pillars their red torches' shine
Held forth unto the night a joyous sign.

SO henceforth did this man at Pheræ dwell,
And what he set his hand to wrought right well,
And won much praise and love in everything,
And came to rule all herdsmen of the King;
But for two things in chief his fame did grow;
And first that he was better with the bow
Than any 'twixt Olympus and the sea,
And then that sweet, heart-piercing melody
He drew out from the rigid-seeming lyre,
And made the circle round the winter fire
More like to heaven than gardens of the May.
So many a heavy thought he chased away
From the King's heart, and softened many a hate,
And choked the spring of many a harsh debate;

And, taught by wounds, the snatchers of the wolds
Lurked round the gates of less well-guarded folds.
Therefore Admetus loved him, yet withal,
Strange doubts and fears upon his heart did fall;
For morns there were when he the man would meet,
His hair wreathed round with bay and blossoms sweet,
Gazing distraught into the brightening east,
Nor taking heed of either man or beast,
Or anything that was upon the earth.
Or sometimes midst the hottest of the mirth,
Within the King's hall, would he seem to wake
As from a dream, and his stringed tortoise take
And strike the chords unbidden, till the hall
Filled with the glorious sound from wall to wall,
Trembled and seemed as it would melt away,
And sunken down the faces weeping lay
That erewhile laughed the loudest; only he
Stood upright, looking forward steadily
With sparkling eyes as one who cannot weep,
Until the storm of music sank to sleep.

But this thing seemed the doubtfullest of all
Unto the King, that should there chance to fall
A festal day, and folk did sacrifice
Unto the gods, ever by some device
The man would be away: yet with all this
His presence doubled all Admetus' bliss,
And happy in all things he seemed to live,
And great gifts to his herdsman did he give.

But now the year came round again to spring,
And southward to Iolchos went the King;
For there did Pelias hold a sacrifice
Unto the gods, and put forth things of price
For men to strive for in the people's sight;
So on a morn of April, fresh and bright,
Admetus shook the golden-studded reins,
And soon from windings of the sweet-banked lanes
The south wind blew the sound of hoof and wheel,
Clatter of brazen shields and clink of steel
Unto the herdsman's ears, who stood awhile
Hearkening the echoes with a godlike smile,
Then slowly gat him foldwards, murmuring,
"Fair music for the wooing of a King."

But in six days again Admetus came,
With no lost labour or dishonoured name;
A scarlet cloak upon his back he bare
A gold crown on his head, a falchion fair
Girt to his side; behind him four white steeds,
Whose dams had fed full in Nisæan meads;
All prizes that his valiant hands had won
Within the guarded lists of Tyro's son.
Yet midst the sound of joyous minstrelsy
No joyous man in truth he seemed to be;
So that folk looking on him said, "Behold,
The wise King will not show himself too bold
Amidst his greatness: the gods too are great,
And who can tell the dreadful ways of fate."

Howe'er it was, he gat him through the town,

And midst their shouts at last he lighted down
At his own house, and held high feast that night;
And yet by seeming had but small delight
In aught that any man could do or say:
And on the morrow, just at dawn of day,
Rose up and clad himself, and took his spear,
And in the fresh and blossom-scented air
Went wandering till he reach Bœbeis' shore;
Yet by his troubled face set little store
By all the songs of birds and scent of flowers;
Yea, rather unto him the fragrant hours
Were grown but dull and empty of delight.
So going, at the last he came in sight
Of his new herdsman, who that morning lay
Close by the white sand of a little bay
The teeming ripple of Bœbeis lapped;
There he in cloak of white-woolled sheepskin wrapped
Against the cold dew, free from trouble sang,
The while the heifers' bells about him rang
And mingled with the sweet soft-throated birds
And bright fresh ripple: listen, then, these words
Will tell the tale of his felicity,
Halting and void of music though they be.

SONG.

O DWELLERS on the lovely earth,
Why will ye break your rest and mirth
To weary us with fruitless prayer;
Why will ye toil and take such care

For children's children yet unborn,
And garner store of strife and scorn
To gain a scarce-remembered name,
Cumbered with lies and soiled with shame?
And if the gods care not for you,
What is this folly ye must do
To win some mortal's feeble heart?
O fools! when each man plays his part,
And heeds his fellow little more:
Than these blue waves that kiss the shore
Take heed of how the daisies grow.
O fools! and if ye could but know
How fair a world to you is given.

O brooder on the hills of heaven,
When for my sin thou drav'st me forth,
Hadst thou forgot what this was worth,
Thine own hand made? The tears of men,
The death of threescore years and ten,
The trembling of the timorous race—
Had these things so bedimmed the place
Thine own hand made, thou couldst not know
To what a heaven the earth might grow
If fear beneath the earth were laid,
If hope failed not, nor love decayed.

He stopped, for he beheld his wandering lord,
Who, drawing near, heard little of his word,
And noted less; for in that haggard mood

Nought could he do but o'er his sorrows brood,
Whate'er they were, but now being come anigh,
He lifted up his drawn face suddenly,
And as the singer gat him to his feet,
His eyes Admetus' troubled eyes, did meet,
As with some speech he now seemed labouring,
Which from his heart his lips refused to bring.
Then spoke the herdsman, "Master, what is this,
That thou, returned with honour to the bliss,
The gods have given thee here, still makest show
To be some wretch bent with the weight of woe?
What wilt thou have? What help there is in me
Is wholly thine, for in felicity
Within thine house thou still hast let me live,
Nor grudged most noble gifts to me to give."

"Yea," said Admetus, "thou canst help indeed,
But as the spring shower helps the unsown mead.
Yet listen: at Iolchos the first day
Unto Diana's house I took my way,
Where all men gathered ere the games began,
There, at the right side of the royal man,
Who rules Iolchos, did his daughter stand,
Who with a suppliant bough in her right hand
Headed the band of maidens; but to me
More than a goddess did she seem to be,
Nor fit to die; and therewithal I thought
That we had all been thither called for nought
But that her bridegroom Pelias might choose,

And with that thought desire did I let loose,
And striving not with Love, I gazed my fill,
As one who will not fear the coming ill:
Ah, foolish were mine eyes, foolish my heart,
To strive in such a marvel to have part!
What god shall wed her rather? no more fear
Than vexes Pallas vexed her forehead clear,
Faith shone from out her eyes, and on her lips
Unknown love trembled; the Phœnician ships
Within their dark holds nought so precious bring
As her soft golden hair, no daintiest thing
I ever saw was half so wisely wrought
As was her rosy ear; beyond all thought,
All words to tell of, her veiled body showed,
As, by the image of the Three-formed bowed,
She laid her offering down; then I drawn near
The murmuring of her gentle voice could hear,
As waking one hears music in the morn,
Ere yet the fair June sun is fully born;
And sweeter than the roses fresh with dew
Sweet odours floated round me, as she drew
Some golden thing from out her balmy breast
With her right hand, the while her left hand pressed
The hidden wonders of her girdlestead;
And when abashed I sank adown my head,
Dreading the god of Love, my eyes must meet
The happy bands about her perfect feet.

"What more? thou knowst perchance what thing
love is?

Kindness, and hot desire, and rage, and bliss,
None first a moment; but before that day
No love I knew but what might pass away
When hot desire was changed to certainty,
Or not abide much longer; e'en such stings
Had smitten me, as the first warm day brings
When March is dying; but now half a god
The crowded way unto the lists I trod,
Yet hopeless as a vanquished god at whiles,
And hideous seemed the laughter and the smiles,
And idle talk about me on the way.

"But none could stand before me on that day,
I was as god-possessed, not knowing how
The King had brought her forth but for a show,
To make his glory greater through the land:
Therefore at last victorious I did stand
Among my peers, nor yet one well-known name
Had gathered any honour from my shame.
For there indeed both men of Thessaly,
Œtolians, Thebans, dwellers by the sea,
And folk of Attica and Argolis,
Arcadian woodmen, islanders, whose bliss
Is to be tossed about from wave to wave,
All these at last to me the honour gave,
Nor did they grudge it: yea, and one man said,
A wise Thessalian with a snowy head,
And voice grown thin with age, 'O Pelias,
Surely to thee no evil thing it was
That to thy house this rich Thessalian

Should come, to prove himself a valiant man
Amongst these heroes; for if I be wise
By dint of many years, with wistful eyes
Doth he behold thy daughter, this fair maid;
And surely, if the matter were well weighed,
Good were it both for thee and for the land
That he should take the damsel by the hand
And lead her hence, for ye near neighbours dwell;
What sayest thou, King, have I said ill or well?'

"With that must I, a fool, stand forth and ask
If yet there lay before me some great task
That I must do ere I the maid should wed,
But Pelias, looking on us, smiled and said,
'O neighbour of Larissa, and thou too,
O King Admetus, this may seem to you
A little matter; yea, and for my part
E'en such a marriage would make glad my heart;
But we the blood of Salmoneus who share
With godlike gifts great burdens also bear,
Nor is this maid without them, for the day
On which her maiden zone she puts away
Shall be her death-day, if she wed with one
By whom this marvellous thing may not be done,
For in the traces neither must steeds paw
Before my threshold, or white oxen draw
The wain that comes my maid to take from me,
Far other beasts that day her slaves must be:
The yellow lion 'neath the lash must roar,
And by his side unscared, the forest boar

Toil at the draught: what sayest thou then hereto,
O lord of Pheræ, wilt thou come to woo
In such a chariot, and win endless fame,
Or turn thine eyes elsewhere with little shame?'
"What answered I? O herdsman, I was mad
With sweet love and the triumph I had had.
I took my father's ring from off my hand,
And said, 'O heroes of the Grecian land
Be witnesses that on my father's name
For this man's promise, do I take the shame
Of this deed undone, if I fail herein;
Fear not, O Pelias, but that I shall win
This ring from thee, when that I come again
Through fair Iolchos, driving that strange wain.
Else by this token, thou, O King, shalt have
Pheræ my home, while on the tumbling wave
A hollow ship my sad abode shall be.'
"So driven by some hostile deity,
Such words I said, and with my gifts hard won,
But little valued now, set out upon
My homeward way: but nearer as I drew
To mine abode, and ever fainter grew
In my weak heart the image of my love,
In vain with fear my boastful folly strove;
For I remembered that no god I was
Though I had chanced my fellows to surpass;
And I began to mind me in a while
What murmur rose, with what a mocking smile
Pelias stretched out his hand to take the ring,

Made by my drunkard's gift now twice a king :
And when unto my palace-door I came
I had awakened fully to my shame ;
For certainly no help is left to me,
But I must get me down unto the sea
And build a keel, and whatso things I may
Set in her hold, and cross the watery way
Whither Jove bids, and the rough winds may blow
Unto a land where none my folly know,
And there begin a weary life anew."

Eager and bright the herdsman's visage grew
The while this tale was told, and at the end
He said, " Admetus, I thy life may mend,
And thou at lovely Pheræ still may dwell ;
Wait for ten days, and then may all be well,
And thou to fetch thy maiden home may go,
And to the King thy team unheard-of show.
And if not, then make ready for the sea
Nor will I fail indeed to go with thee,
And 'twixt the halyards and the ashen oar
Finish the service well begun ashore ;
But meanwhile do I bid thee hope the best ;
And take another herdsman for the rest,
For unto Ossa must I go alone
To do a deed not easy to be done."

Then springing up he took his spear and bow
And northward by the lake-shore 'gan to go ;

But the King gazed upon him as he went,
Then, sighing, turned about, and homeward bent
His lingering steps, and hope began to spring
Within his heart, for some betokening
He seemed about the herdsman now to see
Of one from mortal cares and troubles free.
And so midst hopes and fears day followed day,
Until at last upon his bed he lay
When the grey, creeping dawn had now begun
To make the wide world ready for the sun
On the tenth day: sleepless had been the night
And now in that first hour of gathering light
For weariness he slept, and dreamed that he
Stood by the border of a fair, calm sea
At point to go a-shipboard, and to leave
Whatever from his sire he did receive
Of land or kingship; and withal he dreamed
That through the cordage a bright light there gleamed
Far off within the east; and nowise sad
He felt at leaving all he might have had,
But rather as a man who goes to see
Some heritage expected patiently.
But when he moved to leave the firm fixed shore,
The windless sea rose high and 'gan to roar,
And from the gangway thrust the ship aside,
Until he hung over a chasm wide
Vocal with furious waves, yet had no fear
For all the varied tumult he might hear,
But slowly woke up to the morning light

That to his eyes seemed past all memory bright,
And then strange sounds he heard, whereat his heart
Woke up to joyous life with one glad start,
And nigh his bed he saw the herdsman stand,
Holding a long white staff in his right hand,
Carved with strange figures; and withal he said,
"Awake, Admetus! loiter not a-bed,
But haste thee to bring home thy promised bride,
For now an ivory chariot waits outside,
Yoked to such beasts as Pelias bade thee bring;
Whose guidance thou shalt find an easy thing,
If in thine hands thou holdest still this rod,
Whereon are carved the names of every god
That rules the fertile earth; but having come
Unto King Pelias' well adorned home,
Abide not long, but take the royal maid,
And let her dowry in thy wain be laid,
Of silver and fine cloth and unmixed gold,
For this indeed will Pelias not withhold
When he shall see thee like a very god.
Then let thy beasts, ruled by this carven rod,
Turn round to Pheræ; yet must thou abide
Before thou comest to the streamlet's side
That feed its dykes; there, by the little wood
Wherein unto Diana men shed blood,
Will I await thee, and thou shalt descend
And hand-in-hand afoot through Pheræ wend;
And yet I bid thee, this night let thy bride
Apart among the womenfolk abide;

That on the morrow thou with sacrifice
For these strange deeds may pay a fitting price."

But as he spoke with something like to awe,
His eyes and much changed face Admetus saw,
And voiceless like a slave his words obeyed;
For rising up no more delay he made,
But took the staff and gained the palace-door [roar
Where stood the beasts, whose mingled whine and
Had wrought his dream; there two and two they stood,
Thinking, it might be, of the tangled wood,
And all the joys of the food-hiding trees,
But harmless as their painted images
'Neath some dread spell; then, leaping up, he took
The reins in hand and the bossed leather shook,
And no delay the conquered beasts durst make
But drew, not silent; and folk just awake
When he went by, as though a god they saw,
Fell on their knees, and maidens come to draw
Fresh water from the fount sank trembling down,
And silence held the babbling wakened town.
So 'twixt the dewy hedges did he wend,
And still their noise afar the beasts did send,
His strange victorious advent to proclaim,
Till to Iolchos at the last he came,
And drew anigh the gates, whence in affright
The guards fled, helpless at the wondrous sight;
And through the town news of the coming spread
Of some great god so that the scared priests led

Pale suppliants forth; who, in unmeet attire
And hastily-caught boughs and smouldering fire
Within their censers, in the market-place
Awaited him with many an upturned face,
Trembling with fear of that unnamed new god;
But through the midst of them his lions trod
With noiseless feet, nor noted aught their prey,
And the boars' hooves went pattering on the way,
While from their churning tusks the white foam flew
As raging, helpless, in the trace they drew.

But Pelias, knowing all the work of fate,
Sat in his brazen-pillared porch to wait
The coming of the King; the while the maid
In her fair marriage garments was arrayed,
And from strong places of his treasury
Men brought fine scarlet from the Syrian sea,
And works of brass, and ivory, and gold;
But when the strange yoked beasts he did behold
Come through the press of people terrified,
Then he arose and o'er the clamour cried,
"Hail, thou, who like a very god art come
To bring great honour to my damsel's home;"
And when Admetus tightened rein before
The gleaming, brazen-wrought, half-open door,
He cried to Pelias, "Hail, to thee, O King;
Let me behold once more my father's ring,
Let me behold the prize that I have won,
Mine eyes are wearying now to look upon."

"Fear not," he said, "the fates are satisfied;

Yet wilt thou not descend and here abide,
Doing me honour till the next bright morn
Has dried the dew upon the new-sprung corn,
That we in turn may give the honour due
To such a man that such a thing can do,
And unto all the gods may sacrifice?"
"Nay," said Admetus, "if thou call'st me wise,
And like a very god thou dost me deem,
Shall I abide the ending of the dream
And so gain nothing? nay, let me be glad
That I at least one godlike hour have had
At whatsoever time I come to die,
That I may mock the world that passes by,
And yet forgets it." Saying this, indeed,
Of Pelias did he seem to take small heed,
But spoke as one unto himself may speak,
And still the half-shut door his eyes did seek,
Wherethrough from distant rooms sweet music came,
Setting his over-strained heart a-flame,
Because amidst the Lydian flutes he thought
From place to place his love the maidens brought.
Then Pelias said, "What can I give to thee
Who fail'st so little of divinity?
Yet let my slaves lay these poor gifts within
Thy chariot, while my daughter strives to win
The favour of the spirits of this place,
Since from their altars she must turn her face
For ever now; hearken, her flutes I hear,
From the last chapel doth she draw anear."

Then by Admetus' feet the folk 'gan pile
The precious things, but he no less the while
Stared at the door ajar, and thought it long
Ere with the flutes mingled the maidens' song,
And both grew louder, and the scarce seen floor
Was fluttering with white raiment, and the door
By slender fingers was set open wide,
And midst her damsels he beheld the bride
Ungirt, with hair unbound and garlanded:
Then Pelias took her slender hand and said,
"Daughter, this is the man that takes from thee
Thy curse midst women, think no more to be
Childless, unloved, and knowing little bliss;
But now behold how like a god he is,
And yet with what prayers for the love of thee
He must have wearied some divinity,
And therefore in thine inmost heart be glad
That thou 'mongst women such a man hast had." [saw
Then she with wondering eyes that strange team
A moment, then as one with gathering awe
Might turn from Jove's bird unto very Jove,
So did she raise her grey eyes to her love,
But to her brow the blood rose therewithal,
And she must tremble, such a look did fall
Upon her faithful eyes, that none the less
Would falter aught, for all her shamefastness,
But rather to her lover's hungry eyes
Gave back a tender look of glad surprise,
Wherein love's flame began to flicker now.

Withal, her father kissed her on the brow,
And said, "O daughter, take this royal ring,
And set it on the finger of the King,
And come not back; and thou Admetus, pour
This wine to Jove before my open door,
And glad at heart take back thine own with thee."

Then with that word Alcestis silently,
And with no look cast back, and ring in hand,
Went forth, and soon beside her love did stand,
Nor on his finger failed to set the ring;
And then a golden cup the city's King
Gave to him, and he poured and said, "O thou,
From whatsoever place thou lookest now,
What prayers, what gifts unto thee shall I give
That we a little time with love may live?
A little time of love, then fall asleep
Together, while the crown of love we keep."

So spake he, and his strange beasts turned about,
And heeded not the people's wavering shout
That from their old fear and new pleasure sprang,
Nor noted aught of what the damsels sung,
Or of the flowers that after them they cast,
But like a dream the guarded city passed,
And 'twixt the song of birds and blossoms' scent
It seemed for many hundred years they went,
Though short the way was unto Pheræ's gates;
Time they forgat, and gods, and men, and fates,
However nigh unto their hearts they were;
The woodland boars, the yellow lords of fear,

No more seemed strange to them, but all the earth
With all its changing sorrow and wild mirth
In that fair hour seemed new-born to the twain,
Grief seemed a play forgot, a pageant vain,
A picture painted, who knows where or when,
With soulless images of restless men;
For every thought but love was past away,
And they forgot that they should ever die.

But when they came anigh the sacred wood,
There, biding them, Admetus' herdsman stood,
At sight of whom those yoke fellows unchecked
Stopped dead and little of Admetus recked
Who now, as one from dreams not yet awoke,
Drew back his love and that strange wain forsook,
And gave the carven rod and guiding bands
Into the waiting herdsman's outstretched hands,
But when he fain had thanked him for the thing
That he had done, his speechless tongue would cling
Unto his mouth, and why he could not tell.
But the man said, "No words! thou hast done well
To me, as I to thee; the day may come
When thou shalt ask me for a fitting home,
Nor shalt thou ask in vain; but hasten now,
And to thine house this royal maiden show,
Then give her to thy women for this night.
But when thou wakest up to thy delight
To-morrow, do all things that should be done,
Nor of the gods, forget thou any one,

And on the next day will I come again
To tend thy flocks upon the grassy plain.
"But now depart, and from thine home send here
Chariot and horse, these gifts of thine to bear
Unto thine house, and going, look not back
Lest many a wished-for thing thou com'st to lack."
Then hand-in-hand together, up the road
The lovers passed unto the King's abode,
And as they went, the whining snort and roar
From the yoked beasts they heard break out once more
And then die off, as they were led away,
But whether to some place lit up by day,
Or, neath the earth, they knew not, for the twain
Went hastening on, nor once looked back again.
But soon the minstrels met them, and a band
Of white-robed damsels flowery boughs in hand,
To bid them welcome to that pleasant place.
Then they, rejoicing much, in no long space
Came to the brazen-pillared porch, whereon
From 'twixt the passes of the hills yet shone
The dying sun; and there she stood awhile
Without the threshold, a faint tender smile
Trembling upon her lips 'twixt love and shame,
Until each side of her a maiden came
And raised her in their arms, that her fair feet
The polished brazen threshold might not meet,
And in Admetus' house she stood at last.
But to the women's chamber straight she passed
Bepraised of all,—and so the wakeful night

Lonely the lovers passed e'en as they might.
But the next day, with many a sacrifice,
Admetus wrought, for such a well-won prize,
A life so blest, the gods to satisfy,
And many a matchless beast that day did die
Upon the altars; nought unlucky seemed
To be amid the joyous crowd that gleamed
With gold and precious things, and only this
Seemed wanting to the King of Pheræ's bliss,
That all these pageants should be soon past by,
And hid by night the fair spring blossoms lie.

YET on the morrow-morn Admetus came,
A haggard man oppressed with grief and shame
Unto the spot beside Bœbeis' shore
Whereby he met his herdsman once before,
And there again he found him flushed and glad,
And from the babbling water newly clad,
Then he with downcast eyes these words began,
"O thou, whatso thy name is, god or man,
Hearken to me; meseemeth of thy deed
Some dread immortal taketh angry heed.
"Last night the height of my desire seemed won,
All day my weary eyes had watched the sun

Rise up and sink, and now was come the night
When I should be alone with my delight;
Silent the house was now from floor to roof,
And in the well-hung chambers, far aloof,
The feasters lay; the moon was in the sky,
The soft spring wind was wafting lovingly
Across the gardens fresh scents to my sweet,
As, troubled with the sound of my own feet,
I passed betwixt the pillars, whose long shade
Black on the white red-veined floor was laid:
So happy was I that the briar-rose,
Rustling outside within the flowery close,
Seemed but Love's odorous wing—too real all seemed
For such a joy as I had never dreamed.

"Why do I linger, as I lingered not
In that fair hour, now ne'er to be forgot
While my life lasts?—Upon the gilded door
I laid my hand; I stood upon the floor
Of the bride-chamber, and I saw the bride,
Lovelier than any dream, stand by the side
Of the gold bed, with hands that hid her face:
One cry of joy I gave, and then the place
Seemed changed to hell as in a hideous dream.

"Still did the painted silver pillars gleam
Betwixt the scented torches and the moon;
Still did the garden shed its odorous boon
Upon the night; still did the nightingale
Unto his brooding mate tell all his tale:
But, risen 'twixt my waiting love and me,

As soundless as the dread eternity,
Sprung up from nothing, could mine eyes behold
A huge dull-gleaming dreadful coil that rolled
In changing circles on the pavement fair.
Then for the sword that was no longer there
My hand sank to my side; around I gazed,
And 'twixt the coils I met her grey eyes, glazed
With sudden horror most unspeakable;
And when mine own upon no weapon fell,
For what should weapons do in such a place,
Unto the dragon's head I set my face,
And raised bare hands against him, but a cry
Burst on mine ears of utmost agony
That nailed me there, and she cried out to me,
'O get thee hence; alas, I cannot flee!
They coil about me now, my lips to kiss.
O love, why hast thou brought me unto this?'
"Alas, my shame! trembling, away I slunk,
Yet turning saw the fearful coil had sunk
To whence it came, my love's limbs freed I saw,
And a long breath at first I heard her draw
As one redeemed, then heard the hard sobs come,
And wailings for her new accursed home.
But there outside across the door I lay,
Like a scourged hound, until the dawn of day;
And as her gentle breathing then I heard
As though she slept, before the earliest bird
Began his song, I wandered forth to seek
Thee, O strange man, e'en as thou seest me, weak

With all the torment of the night, and shamed
With such a shame as never shall be named
To aught but thee—Yea, yea, and why to thee
Perchance this ends all thou wilt do for me?—
What then, and have I not a cure for that?
Lo, yonder is a rock where I have sat
Full many an hour while yet my life was life,
With hopes of all the coming wonder rife.
No sword hangs by my side, no god will turn
This cloudless hazy blue to black, and burn
My useless body with his lightning flash;
But the white waves above my bones may wash,
And when old chronicles our house shall name
They may leave out the letters and the shame,
That make Admetus, once a king of men—
And how could I be worse or better then?"

As one who notes a curious instrument
Working against the maker's own intent,
The herdsman eyed his wan face silently,
And smiling for a while, and then said he,—
"Admetus, thou, in spite of all I said,
Hast drawn this evil thing upon thine head,
Forgetting her who erewhile laid the curse
Upon the maiden, so for fear of worse
Go back again; for fair-limbed Artemis
Now bars the sweet attainment of thy bliss;
So taking heart, yet make no more delay
But worship her upon this very day,

Nor spare for aught, and of thy trouble make
No semblance unto any for her sake;
And thick upon the fair bride-chamber floor
Strew dittany, and on each side the door
Hang up such poppy-leaves as spring may yield;
And for the rest, myself may be a shield
Against her wrath—nay, be thou not too bold
To ask me that which may not now be told.
Yea, even what thou deemest, hide it deep
Within thine heart, and let thy wonder sleep,
For surely thou shalt one day know my name,
When the time comes again that autumn's flame
Is dying off the vine boughs, overturned,
Stripped of their wealth. But now let gifts be burned
To her I told thee of, and in three days
Shall I by many hard and rugged ways
Have come to thee again to bring thee peace.
Go, the sun rises and the shades decrease."

Then, thoughtfully, Admetus gat him back,
Nor did the altars of the Huntress lack
The fattest of the flocks upon that day.
But when night came, in arms Admetus lay
Across the threshold of the bride-chamber,
And nought amiss that night he noted there,
But durst not enter, though about the door
Young poppy leaves were twined, and on the floor,
Not flowered as yet with downy leaves and grey,
Fresh dittany beloved of wild goats lay.

But when the whole three days and nights were done,

The herdsman came with rising of the sun,
And said, "Admetus, now rejoice again,
Thy prayers and offerings have not been in vain,
And thou at last mayst come unto thy bliss;
And if thou askest for a sign of this,
Take thou this token; make good haste to rise,
And get unto the garden-close that lies
Below these windows sweet with greenery,
And in the midst a marvel shalt thou see,
Three white, black-hearted poppies blossoming,
Though this is but the middle of the spring."

Nor was it otherwise than he had said,
And on that day with joy the twain were wed,
And gan to lead a life of great delight;
But the strange woeful history of that night,
The monstrous car, the promise to the King,
All these through weary hours of chiselling
Were wrought in stone, and in Diana's wall
Set up, a joy and witness unto all.

But neither so would winged time abide,
The changing year came round to autumn-tide,
Until at last the day was fully come
When the strange guest first reached Admetus' home.
Then, when the sun was reddening to its end,
He to Admetus' brazen porch did wend,
Whom there he found feathering a poplar dart,
Then said he, "King, the time has come to part,
Come forth, for I have that to give thine ear
No man upon the earth but thou must hear."

Then rose the King, and with a troubled look
His well-steeled spear within his hand he took,
And by his herdsman silently he went
As to a peaked hill his steps he bent,
Nor did the parting servant speak one word,
As up they climbed, unto his silent lord,
Till from the top he turned about his head
From all the glory of the gold light, shed
Upon the hill-top by the setting sun,
For now indeed the day was well-nigh done,
And all the eastern vale was grey and cold;
But when Admetus he did now behold,
Panting beside him from the steep ascent,
One godlike, changed look on him he bent,
And said, "O mortal, listen, for I see
Thou deemest somewhat of what is in me;
Fear not! I love thee, even as I can
Who cannot feel the woes and ways of man
In spite of this my seeming, for indeed
Now thou beholdest Jove's immortal seed;
And what my name is I would tell thee now,
If men who dwell upon the earth as thou
Could hear the name and live; but on the earth,
With strange melodious stories of my birth,
Phœbus men call me, and Latona's son.

"And now my servitude with thee is done,
And I shall leave thee toiling on thine earth,
This handful, that within its little girth
Holds that which moves you so, O men that die;

Behold, to-day thou hast felicity,
But the times change, and I can see a day
When all thine happiness shall fade away;
And yet be merry, strive not with the end,
Thou canst not change it; for the rest, a friend
This year has won thee who shall never fail:
But now indeed, for nought will it avail
To say what I may have in store for thee,
Of gifts that men desire; let these things be,
And live thy life, till death itself shall come,
And turn to nought the storehouse of thine home,
Then think of me; these feathered shafts behold,
That here have been the terror of the wold,
Take these, and count them still the best of all
Thy envied wealth, and when on thee shall fall
By any way the worst extremity,
Call upon me before thou com'st to die,
And lay these shafts with incense on a fire,
That thou mayst gain thine uttermost desire."

He ceased, but ere the golden tongue was still
An odorous mist had stolen up the hill,
And to Admetus first the god grew dim,
And then was but a lovely voice to him,
And then at last the sun had sunk to rest,
And a fresh wind blew lightly from the west
Over the hill-top, and no soul was there;
But the sad dying autumn field-flowers fair,
Rustled dry leaves about the windy place,

Where even now had been the godlike face,
And in their midst the brass-bound quiver lay.
Then, going further westward, far away,
He saw the gleaming of Peneus wan
'Neath the white sky, but never any man,
Except a grey-haired shepherd driving down
From off the long slopes to his fold-yard brown
His woolly sheep, with whom a maiden went,
Singing for labour done and sweet content
Of coming rest; with that he turned again,
And took the shafts up, never sped in vain,
And came unto his house most deep in thought
Of all the things the varied year had brought.

THENCEFORTH in bliss and honour day by day
His measured span of sweet life wore away.
A happy man he was; no vain desire
Of foolish fame had set his heart a-fire;
No care he had the ancient bounds to change,
Nor yet for him must idle soldiers range
From place to place about the burdened land,
Or thick upon the ruined cornfields stand;
For him no trumpets blessed the bitter war,
Wherein the right and wrong so mingled are,
That hardly can the man of single heart
Amid the sickening turmoil choose his part;

For him sufficed the changes of the year,
The god-sent terror was enough of fear
For him; enough the battle with the earth,
The autumn triumph over drought and dearth.
Better to him than wolf-moved battered shields,
O'er poor dead corpses, seemed the stubble fields
Danced down beneath the moon, until the night
Grew dreamy with a shadowy sweet delight,
And with the high-risen moon came pensive thought,
And men in love's despite must grow distraught
And loiter in the dance, and maidens drop
Their gathered raiment, and the fifer stop
His dancing notes the pensive drone that chid,
And as they wander to their dwellings, hid
By the black shadowed trees, faint melody,
Mournful and sweet, their soft goodnight must be.
Far better spoil the gathering vat bore in
Unto the pressing shed, than midst the din
Of falling houses in war's waggon lies
Besmeared with redder stains than Tyrian dyes;
Or when the temple of the sea-born one
With glittering crowns and gay attire shone,
Fairer the maidens seemed by no chain bound,
But such as amorous arms might cast around
Their lovely bodies, than the wretched band
Who midst the shipmen by the gangway stand;
Each lonely in her speechless misery,
And thinking of the worse time that shall be,
When midst of folk who scarce can speak her name,

She bears the uttermost of toil and shame.
Better to him seemed that victorious crown,
That midst the reverent silence of the town
He oft would set upon some singer's brow
Than was the conqueror's diadem, blest now
By lying priests, soon, bent and bloody, hung
Within the thorn by linnets well besung,
Who think but little of the corpse beneath,
Though ancient lands have trembled at his breath.
But to this King—fair Ceres' gifts, the days
Whereon men sung in flushed Lyæus' praise
Tales of old time, the bloodless sacrifice
Unto the goddess of the downcast eyes
And soft persuading lips, the ringing lyre
Unto the bearer of the holy fire
Who once had been amongst them—things like these
Seemed meet to him men's yearning to appease,
These were the triumphs of the peaceful king.

And so, betwixt seed-time and harvesting,
With little fear his life must pass away;
And for the rest, he, from the self-same day
That the god left him, seemed to have some share
In that same godhead he had harboured there:
In all things grew his wisdom and his wealth,
And folk beholding the fair state and health
Wherein his land was, said, that now at last
A fragment of the Golden Age was cast
Over the place, for there was no debate,

And men forgot the very name of hate.
Nor failed the love of her he erst had won
To hold his heart as still the years wore on,
And she, no whit less fair than on the day
When from Iolchos first she passed away,
Did all his will as though he were a god,
And loving still, the downward way she trod.
Honour and love, plenty and peace, he had;
Nor lacked for aught that makes a wise man glad,
That makes him like a rich well-honoured guest
Scarce sorry when the time comes, for the rest,
That at the last perforce must bow his head.
And yet—was death not much remembered,
As still with happy men the manner is?
Or, was he not so pleased with this world's bliss,
As to be sorry when the time should come
When but his name should hold his ancient home
While he dwelt nowhere? either way indeed,
Will be enough for most men's daily need,
And with calm faces they may watch the world,
And note men's lives hither and thither hurled,
As folk may watch the unfolding of a play—
Nor this, nor that was King Admetus' way,
For neither midst the sweetness of his life
Did he forget the ending of the strife,
Nor yet for heavy thoughts of passing pain
Did all his life seem lost to him or vain,
A wasteful jest of Jove, an empty dream;
Rather before him did a vague hope gleam,

That made him a great-hearted man and wise,
Who saw the deeds of men with far-seeing eyes,
And dealt them pitying justice still, as though
The inmost heart of each man he did know;
This hope it was, and not his kingly place
That made men's hearts rejoice to see his face
Rise in the council hall; through this, men felt
That in their midst a son of man there dwelt
Like and unlike them, and their friend through all;
And still as time went on, the more would fall
This glory on the King's beloved head,
And round his life fresh hope and fear were shed.

Yet at the last his good days passed away,
And sick upon his bed Admetus lay,
'Twixt him and death nought but a lessening veil
Of hasty minutes, yet did hope not fail,
Nor did bewildering fear torment him then,
But still as ever, all the ways of men
Seemed clear to him: but he, while yet his breath
Still held the gateway 'gainst the arms of death,
Turned to his wife, who, bowed beside the bed,
Wept for his love, and dying goodlihead,
And bade her put all folk from out the room,
Then going to the treasury's rich gloom
To bear the arrows forth, the Lycian's gift.
So she, amidst her blinding tears, made shift
To find laid in the inmost treasury
Those shafts, and brought them unto him, but he,

Beholding them, beheld therewith his life,
Both that now past, with many marvels rife,
And that which he had hoped he yet should see.
Then spoke he faintly, "Love, 'twixt thee and me
A film has come, and I am fainting fast:
And now our ancient happy life is past;
For either this is death's dividing hand,
And all is done, or if the shadowy land
I yet escape, full surely if I live
The god with life some other gift will give,
And change me to thee: even at this tide
Like a dead man among you all I bide,
Until I once again behold my guest,
And he has given me either life or rest:
Alas, my love! that thy too loving heart
Nor with my life or death can have a part.
O cruel words! yet death is cruel too:
Stoop down and kiss me, for I yearn for you
E'en as the autumn yearneth for the sun."
"O love, a little time we have been one,
And if we now are twain weep not therefore;
For many a man on earth desireth sore
To have some mate upon the toilsome road,
Some sharer of his still increasing load,
And yet for all his longing and his pain
His troubled heart must seek for love in vain,
And till he dies still must he be alone—
But now, although our love indeed is gone,
Yet to this land as thou art leal and true

Set now thine hand to what I bid thee do,
Because I may not die; rake up the brands
Upon the hearth, and from these trembling hands
Cast incense thereon, and upon them lay
These shafts, the relics of a happier day,
Then watch with me; perchance I may not die,
Though the supremest hour now draws anigh
Of life or death—O thou who madest me,
The only thing on earth alike to thee,
Why must I be unlike to thee in this?
Consider, if thou dost not do amiss
To slay the only thing that feareth death
Or knows its name, of all things drawing breath
Upon the earth: see now for no short hour,
For no half-halting death, to reach me slower
Than other men, I pray thee—what avail
To add some trickling grains unto the tale
Soon told, of minutes thou dost snatch away
From out the midst of that unending day
Wherein thou dwellest? rather grant me this
To right me wherein thou hast done amiss,
And give me life like thine for evermore."

So murmured he, contending very sore
Against the coming death; but she meanwhile,
Faint with consuming love, made haste to pile
The brands upon the hearth, and thereon cast
Sweet incense, and the feathered shafts at last;
Then, trembling, back unto the bed she crept,

And lay down by his side, and no more wept,
Nay scarce could think of death for very love
That in her faithful heart for ever strove
'Gainst fear and grief: but now the incense-cloud
The old familiar chamber did enshroud,
And on the very verge of death drawn close
Wrapt both their weary souls in strange repose,
That through sweet sleep sent kindly images
Of simple things; and in the midst of these,
Whether it was but parcel of their dream,
Or that they woke to it as some might deem,
I know not, but the door was opened wide,
And the King's name a voice long silent cried,
And Phœbus on the very threshold trod,
And yet in nothing liker to a god
Than when he ruled Admetus' herds, for he
Still wore the homespun coat men used to see
Among the heifers in the summer morn,
And round about him hung the herdsman's horn,
And in his hand he bore the herdsman's spear
And cornel bow, the prowling dog-wolf's fear,
Though empty of its shafts the quiver was.
He to the middle of the room did pass,
And said, "Admetus, neither all for nought
My coming to thee is, nor have I brought
Good tidings to thee; poor man, thou shalt live
If any soul for thee sweet life will give
Enforced by none: for such a sacrifice
Alone the fates can deem a fitting price

For thy redemption; in no battle-field,
Maddened by hope of glory life to yield,
To give it up to heal no city's shame
In hope of gaining long-enduring fame;
For whoso dieth for thee must believe
That thou with shame that last gift wilt receive,
And strive henceforward with forgetfulness
The honied draught of thy new life to bless.
Nay, and moreover such a glorious heart
Who loves thee well enough with life to part
But for thy love, with life must lose love too,
Which e'en when wrapped about in weeds of woe
Is godlike life indeed to such an one.

"And now behold, three days ere life is done
Do the fates give thee, and I, even I,
Upon thy life have shed felicity
And given thee love of men, that they in turn
With fervent love of thy dear love might burn.
The people love thee and thy silk-clad breast,
Thine open doors have given thee better rest
Than woods of spears or hills of walls might do,
And even now in wakefulness and woe
The city lies, calling to mind thy love
Wearying with ceaseless prayers the gods above.
But thou—thine heart is wise enough to know
That they no whit from their decrees will go."

So saying, swiftly from the room he passed;
But on the world no look Admetus cast,

But peacefully turned round unto the wall
As one who knows that quick death must befall:
For in his heart he thought, "Indeed too well
I know what men are, this strange tale to tell
To those that live with me: yea, they will weep,
And o'er my tomb most solemn days will keep,
And in great chronicles will write my name,
Telling to many an age my deeds and fame.
For living men such things as this desire,
And by such ways will they appease the fire
Of love and grief: but when death comes to stare
Full in men's faces, and the truth lays bare,
How can we then have wish for anything,
But unto life that gives us all to cling?"
So said he, and with closed eyes did await,
Sleeping or waking, the decrees of fate.

But now Alcestis rose, and by the bed
She stood, with wild thoughts passing through her head.
Dried were her tears, her troubled heart and sore
Throbbed with the anguish of her love no more.
A strange look on the dying man she cast,
Then covered up her face and said, "O past!
Past the sweet times that I remember well!
Alas, that such a tale my heart can tell!
Ah, how I trusted him! what love was mine!
How sweet to feel his arms about me twine,
And my heart beat with his! what wealth of bliss
To hear his praises! all to come to this,

That now I durst not look upon his face,
Lest in my heart that other thing have place,
That which I knew not, that which men call hate.
" O me, the bitterness of God and fate !
A little time ago we two were one ;
I had not lost him though his life was done,
For still was he in me—but now alone
Through the thick darkness must my soul make moan,
For I must die : how can I live to bear
An empty heart about, the nurse of fear?
How can I live to die some other tide,
And, dying, hear my loveless name outcried
About the portals of that weary land
Whereby my shadowy feet should come to stand.
" Alcestis ! O Alcestis, hadst thou known
That thou one day shouldst thus be left alone,
How hadst thou borne a living soul to love !
Hadst thou not rather lifted hands to Jove,
To turn thine heart to stone, thy front to brass,
That through this wondrous world thy soul might pass,
Well-pleased and careless, as Diana goes
Through the thick woods, all pitiless of those
Her shafts smite down? Alas ! how could it be?
Can a god give a god's delights to thee?
Nay rather, Jove, but give me once again,
If for one moment only, that sweet pain
Of love I had while still I thought to live !
Ah ! wilt thou not, since unto thee I give
My life, my hope?—But thou—I come to thee.

Thou sleepest: O wake not, nor speak to me!
In silence let my last hour pass away,
And men forget my bitter feeble day."

With that she laid her down upon the bed,
And nestling to him, kissed his weary head,
And laid his wasted hand upon her breast,
Yet woke him not; and silence and deep rest
Fell on that chamber. The night wore away
Mid gusts of wailing wind, the twilight grey
Stole o'er the sea, and wrought his wondrous change
On things unseen by night, by day not strange,
But now half-seen and strange; then came the sun,
And therewithal the silent world and dun
Waking, waxed many-coloured, full of sound,
As men again their heap of troubles found,
And woke up to their joy or misery.

But there, unmoved by aught, those twain did lie,
Until Admetus' ancient nurse drew near
Unto the open door, and full of fear
Beheld them moving not, and as folk dead;
Then, trembling with her eagerness and dread,
She cried, "Admetus! art thou dead indeed?
Alcestis! livest thou my words to heed?
Alas, alas, for this Thessalian folk!"

But with her piercing cry the King awoke,
And round about him wildly 'gan to stare,
As a bewildered man who knows not where
He has awakened: but not thin or wan

His face was now, as of a dying man,
But fresh and ruddy; and his eyes shone clear,
As of a man who much of life may bear.
And at the first, but joy and great surprise
Shone out from those awakened, new-healed eyes;
But as for something more at last he yearned,
Unto his love with troubled brow he turned,
For still she seemed to sleep: alas, alas!
Her lonely shadow even now did pass
Along the changeless fields, oft looking back,
As though it yet had thought of some great lack.
And here, the hand just fallen from off his breast
Was cold; and cold the bosom his hand pressed.
And even as the colour lit the day
The colour from her lips had waned away;
Yet still, as though that longed-for happiness
Had come again her faithful heart to bless,
Those white lips smiled, unwrinkled was her brow,
But of her eyes no secrets might he know,
For, hidden by the lids of ivory,
Had they beheld that death a-drawing nigh.

Then o'er her dead corpse King Admetus hung,
Such sorrow in his heart as his faint tongue
Refused to utter; yet the just-past night
But dimly he remembered, and the sight
Of the Far-darter, and the dreadful word
That seemed to cut all hope as with a sword:
Yet stronger in his heart a knowledge grew,

That nought it was but her fond heart and true
That all the marvel for his love had wrought,
Whereby from death to life he had been brought;
That dead, his life she was, as she had been
His life's delight while still she lived a queen.
And he fell wondering if his life were gain,
So wrapt as then in loneliness and pain;
Yet therewithal no tears would fill his eyes,
For as a god he was.

Then did he rise
And gat him down unto the Council-place,
And when the people saw his well-loved face
They cried aloud for joy to see him there,
And earth again to them seemed blest and fair.
And though indeed they did lament in turn,
When of Alcestis' end they came to learn,
Scarce was it more than seeming, or, at least,
The silence in the middle of a feast,
When men have memory of their heroes slain.
So passed the order of the world again,
Victorious Summer crowning lusty Spring,
Autumn with cleared fields from the harvesting,
And Winter the earth's sleep; and then again
Spring, Summer, Autumn, and the Winter's pain;
And still and still the same the years went by.

But Time, who slays so many a memory,
Brought hers to light, the short-lived loving Queen;
And her fair soul, as scent of flowers unseen,

Sweetened the turmoil of long centuries.
For soon, indeed, Death laid his hand on these,
The shouters round the throne upon that day.
And for Admetus, he, too, went his way,
Though if he died at all I cannot tell;
But either on the earth he ceased to dwell,
Or else, oft born again, had many a name.
But through all lands of Greece Alcestis' fame
Grew greater, and about her husband's twined
Lived, in the hearts of far-off men enshrined.
See I have told her tale, though I know not
What men are dwelling now on that green spot
Anigh Bœbeis, or if Pheræ still,
With name oft changed perchance, adown the hill
Still shows its white walls to the rising sun.
—The gods at least remember what is done.

STRANGE felt the wanderers at his tale, for now
Their old desires it seemed once more to show
Unto their altered hearts, when now the rest,
Most surely coming, of all things seemed best;—
—Unless, by death perchance they yet might gain
Some space to try such deeds as now in vain
They heard of amidst stories of the past;
Such deeds as they for that wild hope had cast
From out their hands—they sighed to think of it,
And how as deedless men they there must sit.

Yet, with the measured falling of that rhyme
Mingled the lovely sights and glorious time,
Whereby, in spite of hope long past away,
In spite of knowledge growing day by day
Of lives so wasted, in despite of death,
With sweet content that eve they drew their breath,
And scarce their own lives seemed to touch them more
Than that dead Queen's beside Bœbeis' shore;
Bitter and sweet so mingled in them both,
Their lives and that old tale, they had been loth,
Perchance, to have them told another way.—
So passed the sun from that fair summer day.

JUNE drew unto its end, the hot bright days
Now gat from men as much of blame as praise,
As rainless still they passed, without a cloud,
And growing grey at last, the barley bowed
Before the south-east wind. On such a day
These folk amid the trellised roses lay,
And careless for a little while at least,
Crowned with the mingled blossoms held their feast:
Nor did the garden lack for younger folk,
Who cared no more for burning summer's yoke
Than the sweet breezes of the April-tide;
But through the thick trees wandered far and wide
From sun to shade, and shade to sun again,
Until they deemed the elders would be fain
To hear the tale, and shadows longer grew:
Then round about the grave old men they drew,
Both youths and maidens; and beneath their feet
The grass seemed greener, and the flowers more sweet
Unto the elders, as they stood around.

So through the calm air soon arose the sound
Of one old voice as now a Wanderer spoke.
"O friends, and ye, fair loving gentle folk,

Would I could better tell a tale to-day;
But hark to this, which while our good ship lay
Within the Weser such a while agone,
A Fleming told me, as we sat alone
One Sunday evening in the Rose-garland,
And all the other folk were gone a-land
After their pleasure, like sea-faring men.
Surely I deem it no great wonder then
That I remember everything he said,
Since from that Sunday eve strange fortune led
That keel and me on such a weary way—
Well, at the least it serveth you to-day."

THE LADY OF THE LAND.

ARGUMENT.

A CERTAIN Man having landed on an Island in the Greek Sea, found there a beautiful damsel, whom he would fain have delivered from a strange and dreadful doom, but failing herein, he died soon afterwards.

IT happened once, some men of Italy
Midst the Greek islands went a sea-roving,
And much good fortune had they on the sea:
Of many a man they had the ransoming,
And many a chain they gat, and goodly thing;
And midst their voyage to an isle they came,
Whereof my story keepeth not the name.

Now though but little was there left to gain,
Because the richer folk had gone away,
Yet since by this of water they were fain
They came to anchor in a land-locked bay,
Whence in a while some went ashore to play,
Going but lightly armed in twos or threes,
For midst that folk they feared no enemies.

And of these fellows that thus went ashore,
One was there who left all his friends behind;
Who going inland ever more and more,
And being left quite alone, at last did find
A lonely valley sheltered from the wind,
Wherein, amidst an ancient cypress wood,
A long-deserted ruined castle stood.

The wood, once ordered in fair grove and glade,
With gardens overlooked by terraces,
And marble-paved pools for pleasure made,
Was tangled now, and choked with fallen trees;
And he who went there, with but little ease
Must stumble by the stream's side, once made meet
For tender women's dainty wandering feet.

The raven's croak, the low wind choked and drear,
The baffled stream, the grey wolf's doleful cry,
Were all the sounds that mariner could hear,
As through the wood he wandered painfully;
But as unto the house he drew anigh,
The pillars of a ruined shrine he saw,
The once fair temple of a fallen law.

No image was there left behind to tell
Before whose face the knees of men had bowed;
An altar of black stone, of old wrought well,
Alone beneath a ruined roof now showed
The goal whereto the folk were wont to crowd,

Seeking for things forgotten long ago,
Praying for heads long ages laid a-low.

Close to the temple was the castle-gate,
Doorless and crumbling; there our fellow turned,
Trembling indeed at what might chance to wait
The prey entrapped, yet with a heart that burned
To know the most of what might there be learned,
And hoping somewhat too, amid his fear,
To light on such things as all men hold dear.

Noble the house was, nor seemed built for war,
But rather like the work of other days,
When men, in better peace than now they are,
Had leisure on the world around to gaze,
And noted well the past times' changing ways;
And fair with sculptured stories it was wrought,
By lapse of time unto dim ruin brought.

Now as he looked about on all these things,
And strove to read the mouldering histories,
Above the door an image with wide wings,
Whose unclad limbs a serpent seemed to seize,
He dimly saw, although the western breeze,
And years of biting frost and biting rain,
Had made the carver's labour well-nigh vain.

But this, though perished sore, and worn away,
He noted well, because it seemed to be,

After the fashion of another day,
Some great man's badge of war, or armoury,
And round it a carved wreath he seemed to see:
But taking note of these things, at the last
The mariner beneath the gateway passed.

And there a lovely cloistered court he found,
A fountain in the midst o'erthrown and dry,
And in the cloister briers twining round
The slender shafts; the wondrous imagery
Outworn by more than many years gone by,
Because the country people, in their fear
Of wizardry, had wrought destruction here;

And piteously these fair things had been maimed;
There stood great Jove, lacking his head of might;
Here was the archer, swift Apollo, lamed;
The shapely limbs of Venus hid from sight
By weeds and shards; Diana's ankles light
Bound with the cable of some coasting ship;
And rusty nails through Helen's maddening lip.

Therefrom unto the chambers did he pass,
And found them fair still, midst of their decay,
Though in them now no sign of man there was,
And everything but stone had passed away
That made them lovely in that vanished day;
Nay, the mere walls themselves would soon be gone
And nought be left but heaps of mouldering stone.

But he, when all the place he had gone o'er,
And with much trouble clomb the broken stair,
And from the topmost turret seen the shore
And his good ship drawn up at anchor there,
Came down again, and found a crypt most fair
Built wonderfully beneath the greatest hall,
And there he saw a door within the wall,

Well-hinged, close shut; nor was there in that place
Another on its hinges, therefore he
Stood there and pondered for a little space,
And thought, "Perchance some marvel I shall see,
For surely here some dweller there must be,
Because this door seems whole, and new, and sound,
While nought but ruin I can see around."

So with that word, moved by a strong desire,
He tried the hasp, that yielded to his hand,
And in a strange place, lit as by a fire
Unseen but near, he presently did stand;
And by an odorous breeze his face was fanned,
As though in some Arabian plain he stood,
Anigh the border of a spice-tree wood.

He moved not for awhile, but looking round,
He wondered much to see the place so fair,
Because, unlike the castle above ground,
No pillager or wrecker had been there;
It seemed that time had passed on otherwhere,

Nor laid a finger on this hidden place,
Rich with the wealth of some forgotten race.

With hangings, fresh as when they left the loom,
The walls were hung a space above the head,
Slim ivory chairs were set about the room,
And in one corner was a dainty bed,
That seemed for some fair queen apparelled;
And marble was the worst stone of the floor,
That with rich Indian webs was covered o'er.

The wanderer trembled when he saw all this,
Because he deemed by magic it was wrought;
Yet in his heart a longing for some bliss,
Whereof the hard and changing world knows nought,
Arose and urged him on, and dimmed the thought
That there perchance some devil lurked to slay
The heedless wanderer from the light of day.

Over against him was another door
Set in the wall, so, casting fear aside,
With hurried steps he crossed the varied floor,
And there again the silver latch he tried
And with no pain the door he opened wide,
And entering the new chamber cautiously
The glory of great heaps of gold could see.

Upon the floor uncounted medals lay,
Like things of little value; here and there

Stood golden caldrons, that might well outweigh
The biggest midst an emperor's copper ware,
And golden cups were set on tables fair,
Themselves of gold; and in all hollow things
Were stored great gems, worthy the crowns of kings.

The walls and roof with gold were overlaid,
And precious raiment from the wall hung down;
The fall of kings that treasure might have stayed,
Or gained some longing conqueror great renown,
Or built again some god-destroyed old town;
What wonder, if this plunderer of the sea
Stood gazing at it long and dizzily?

But at the last his troubled eyes and dazed
He lifted from the glory of that gold,
And then the image, that well-nigh erased
Over the castle-gate he did behold,
Above a door well wrought in coloured gold
Again he saw; a naked girl with wings
Enfolded in a serpent's scaly rings.

And even as his eyes were fixed on it
A woman's voice came from the other side,
And through his heart strange hopes began to flit
That in some wondrous land he might abide
Not dying, master of a deathless bride,
So o'er the gold he scarcely now could see
He went, and passed this last door eagerly.

Then in a room he stood wherein there was
A marble bath, whose brimming water yet
Was scarcely still; a vessel of green glass
Half-full of odorous ointment was there set
Upon the topmost step that still was wet,
And jewelled shoes and women's dainty gear,
Lay cast upon the varied pavement near.

In one quick glance these things his eyes did see,
But speedily they turned round to behold
Another sight, for throned on ivory
There sat a girl, whose dripping tresses rolled
On to the floor in waves of gleaming gold,
Cast back from such a form as, erewhile shown
To one poor shepherd, lighted up Troy town.

Naked she was, the kisses of her feet
Upon the floor a dying path had made
From the full bath unto her ivory seat;
In her right hand, upon her bosom laid,
She held a golden comb, a mirror weighed
Her left hand down, aback her fair head lay
Dreaming awake of some long vanished day.

Her eyes were shut, but she seemed not to sleep,
Her lips were murmuring things unheard and low,
Or sometimes twitched as though she needs must weep
Though from her eyes the tears refused to flow,
And oft with heavenly red her cheek did glow,

As if remembrance of some half-sweet shame
Across the web of many memories came.

There stood the man, scarce daring to draw breath
For fear the lovely sight should fade away;
Forgetting heaven, forgetting life and death,
Trembling for fear lest something he should say
Unwitting, lest some sob should yet betray
His presence there, for to his eager eyes
Already did the tears begin to rise.

But as he gazed she moved, and with a sigh
Bent forward, dropping down her golden head;
"Alas, alas! another day gone by,
Another day and no soul come," she said;
"Another year, and still I am not dead!"
And with that word once more her head she raised,
And on the trembling man with great eyes gazed.

Then he imploring hands to her did reach,
And toward her very slowly 'gan to move
And with wet eyes her pity did beseech,
And seeing her about to speak he strove
From trembling lips to utter words of love;
But with a look she stayed his doubtful feet,
And made sweet music as their eyes did meet.

For now she spoke in gentle voice and clear,
Using the Greek tongue that he knew full well;

"What man art thou, that thus hast wandered here,
And found this lonely chamber where I dwell?
Beware, beware! for I have many a spell;
If greed of power and gold have led thee on,
Not lightly shall this untold wealth be won.

"But if thou com'st here, knowing of my tale,
In hope to bear away my body fair,
Stout must thine heart be, nor shall that avail
If thou a wicked heart in thee dost bear;
So once again I bid thee to beware,
Because no base man things like this may see,
And live thereafter long and happily."

"Lady," he said, "in Florence is my home,
And in my city noble is my name;
Neither on peddling voyage am I come,
But, like my fathers, bent to gather fame;
And though thy face has set my heart a-flame
Yet of thy story nothing do I know,
But here have wandered heedlessly enow.

"But since the sight of thee mine eyes did bless,
What can I be but thine? what wouldst thou have?
From those thy words, I deem from some distress
By deeds of mine thy dear life I might save;
O then, delay not! if one ever gave
His life to any, mine I give to thee;
Come, tell me what the price of love must be?

"Swift death, to be with thee a day and night
And with the earliest dawning to be slain?
Or better, a long year of great delight,
And many years of misery and pain?
Or worse, and this poor hour for all my gain?
A sorry merchant am I on this day,
E'en as thou willest so must I obey."

She said, "What brave words! nought divine am I,
But an unhappy and unheard-of maid
Compelled by evil fate and destiny
To live, who long ago should have been laid
Under the earth within the cypress shade.
Hearken awhile, and quickly shalt thou know
What deed I pray thee to accomplish now.

"God grant indeed thy words are not for nought!
Then shalt thou save me, since for many a day
To such a dreadful life I have been brought:
Nor will I spare with all my heart to pay
What man soever takes my grief away;
Ah! I will love thee, if thou lovest me
But well enough my saviour now to be.

"My father lived a many years agone
Lord of this land, master of all cunning,
Who ruddy gold could draw from out grey stone,
And gather wealth from many an uncouth thing,
He made the wilderness rejoice and sing,

And such a leech he was that none could say
Without his word what soul should pass away.

"Unto Diana such a gift he gave,
Goddess above, below, and on the earth,
That I should be her virgin and her slave
From the first hour of my most wretched birth;
Therefore my life had known but little mirth
When I had come unto my twentieth year
And the last time of hallowing drew anear.

"So in her temple had I lived and died
And all would long ago have passed away,
But ere that time came, did strange things betide,
Whereby I am alive unto this day;
Alas, the bitter words that I must say!
Ah! can I bring my wretched tongue to tell
How I was brought unto this fearful hell.

"A queen I was, what gods I knew I loved,
And nothing evil was there in my thought,
And yet by love my wretched heart was moved
Until to utter ruin I was brought!
Alas! thou sayest our gods were vain and nought,
Wait, wait, till thou hast heard this tale of mine,
Then shalt thou think them devilish or divine.

"Hearken! in spite of father and of vow
I loved a man; but for that sin I think

Men had forgiven me—yea, yea, even thou;
But from the gods the full cup must I drink,
And into misery unheard-of sink,
Tormented when their own names are forgot,
And men must doubt if they e'er lived or not.

"Glorious my lover was unto my sight,
Most beautiful,—of love we grew so fain
That we at last agreed, that on a night
We should be happy, but that he were slain
Or shut in hold, and neither joy nor pain
Should else forbid that hoped-for time to be;
So came the night that made a wretch of me.

"Ah! well do I remember all that night,
When through the window shone the orb of June,
And by the bed flickered the taper's light,
Whereby I trembled, gazing at the moon:
Ah me! the meeting that we had, when soon
Into his strong, well-trusted arms I fell,
And many a sorrow we began to tell.

"Ah me! what parting on that night we had!
I think the story of my great despair
A little while might merry folk make sad;
For, as he swept away my yellow hair
To make my shoulder and my bosom bare,
I raised mine eyes, and shuddering could behold
A shadow cast upon the bed of gold:

"Then suddenly was quenched my hot desire
And he untwined his arms; the moon so pale
A while ago, seemed changed to blood and fire,
And yet my limbs beneath me did not fail,
And neither had I strength to cry or wail,
But stood there helpless, bare, and shivering,
With staring eyes still fixed upon the thing.

"Because the shade that on the bed of gold
The changed and dreadful moon was throwing down
Was of Diana, whom I did behold,
With knotted hair, and shining girt-up gown,
And on the high white brow, a deadly frown
Bent upon us, who stood scarce drawing breath,
Striving to meet the horrible sure death,

"No word at all the dreadful goddess said,
But soon across my feet my lover lay,
And well indeed I knew that he was dead;
And would that I had died on that same day!
For in a while the image turned away,
And without words my doom I understood,
And felt a horror change my natural blood.

"And there I fell, and on the floor I lay
By the dead man, till daylight came on me,
And not a word thenceforward could I say
For three years, till of grief and misery,
The lingering pest, the cruel enemy,

My father and his folk were dead and gone,
And in this castle I was left alone:

"And then the doom foreseen upon me fell.
For Queen Diana did my body change
Into a fork-tongued dragon flesh and fell,
And through the island nightly do I range,
Or in the green sea mate with monsters strange,
When in the middle of the moonlit night
The sleepy mariner I do affright.

"But all day long upon this gold I lie
Within this place, where never mason's hand
Smote trowel on the marble noisily;
Drowsy I lie, no folk at my command,
Who once was called the Lady of the Land;
Who might have bought a kingdom with a kiss,
Yea, half the world with such a sight as this."

And therewithal, with rosy fingers light,
Backward her heavy-hanging hair she threw,
To give her naked beauty more to sight;
But when, forgetting all the things he knew,
Maddened with love unto the prize he drew,
She cried, "Nay, wait! for wherefore wilt thou die,
Why should we not be happy, thou and I?

"Wilt thou not save me? once in every year
This rightful form of mine that thou dost see

By favour of the goddess have I here
From sunrise unto sunset given me,
That some brave man may end my misery.
And thou—art thou not brave? can thy heart fail,
Whose eyes e'en now are weeping at my tale?

"Then listen! when this day is overpast,
A fearful monster shall I be again,
And thou mayst be my saviour at the last,
Unless, once more, thy words are nought and vain;
If thou of love and sovereignty art fain,
Come thou next morn, and when thou seest here
A hideous dragon, have thereof no fear,

"But take the loathsome head up in thine hands,
And kiss it, and be master presently
Of twice the wealth that is in all the lands,
From Cathay to the head of Italy;
And master also, if it pleaseth thee,
Of all thou praisest as so fresh and bright,
Of what thou callest crown of all delight.

"Ah! with what joy then shall I see again
The sunlight on the green grass and the trees,
And hear the clatter of the summer rain,
And see the joyous folk beyond the seas.
Ah, me! to hold my child upon my knees,
After the weeping of unkindly tears,
And all the wrongs of these four hundred years.

"Go now, go quick! leave this grey heap of stone;
And from thy glad heart think upon thy way,
How I shall love thee—yea, love thee alone,
That bringest me from dark death unto day;
For this shall be thy wages and thy pay;
Unheard-of wealth, unheard-of love is near,
If thou hast heart a little dread to bear."

Therewith she turned to go; but he cried out,
"Ah! wilt thou leave me then without one kiss,
To slay the very seeds of doubt and fear,
That glad to-morrow may bring certain bliss?
Hast thou forgotten how love lives by this,
The memory of some hopeful close embrace,
Low whispered words within some lonely place?"

But she, when his bright glittering eyes she saw,
And burning cheeks, cried out, "Alas, alas!
Must I be quite undone, and wilt thou draw
A worse fate on me than the first one was?
O haste thee from this fatal place to pass!
Yet, ere thou goest, take this, lest thou shouldst deem
Thou hast been fooled by some strange midday dream.

So saying, blushing like a new-kissed maid,
From off her neck a little gem she drew,
That, 'twixt those snowy rose-tinged hillocks laid,
The secrets of her glorious beauty knew;
And ere he well perceived what she would do,

She touched his hand, the gem within it lay,
And, turning, from his sight she fled away.

Then at the doorway where her rosy heel
Had glanced and vanished, he awhile did stare,
And still upon his hand he seemed to feel
The varying kisses of her fingers fair;
Then turned he toward the dreary crypt and bare,
And dizzily throughout the castle passed,
Till by the ruined fane he stood at last.

Then weighing still the gem within his hand,
He stumbled backward though the cypress wood,
Thinking the while of some strange lovely land,
Where all his life should be most fair and good;
Till on the valley's wall of hills he stood,
And slowly thence passed down unto the bay
Red with the death of that bewildering day.

THE next day came, and he, who all the night
Had ceaselessly been turning in his bed,
Arose and clad himself in armour bright,
And many a danger he remembered;
Storming of towns, lone sieges full of dread,
That with renown his heart had borne him through,
And this thing seemed a little thing to do.

So on he went, and on the way he thought
Of all the glorious things of yesterday,
Nought of the price whereat they must be bought,
But ever to himself did softly say,
"No roaming now, my wars are passed away,
No long dull days devoid of happiness,
When such a love my yearning heart shall bless."

Thus to the castle did he come at last,
But when unto the gateway he drew near,
And underneath its ruined archway passed
Into the court, a strange noise did he hear,
And through his heart there shot a pang of fear,
Trembling, he gat his sword into his hand,
And midmost of the cloisters took his stand.

But for a while that unknown noise increased
A rattling, that with strident roars did blend,
And whining moans; but suddenly it ceased,
A fearful thing stood at the cloister's end,
And eyed him for a while, then gan to wend
Adown the cloisters, and began again
That rattling, and the moan like fiends in pain.

And as it came on towards him, with its teeth
The body of a slain goat did it tear,
The blood whereof in its hot jaws did seethe,
And on its tongue he saw the smoking hair;
Then his heart sank, and standing trembling there,

Throughout his mind wild thoughts and fearful ran,
"Some fiend she was," he said, "the bane of man."

Yet he abode her still, although his blood
Curdled within him: the thing dropped the goat,
And creeping on, came close to where he stood,
And raised its head to him, and wrinkled throat,
Then he cried out and wildly at her smote,
Shutting his eyes, and turned and from the place
Ran swiftly, with a white and ghastly face.

But little things rough stones and tree-trunks seemed,
And if he fell, he rose and ran on still;
No more he felt his hurts than if he dreamed,
He made no stay for valley or steep hill,
Heedless he dashed through many a foaming rill,
Until he came unto the ship at last
And with no word into the deep hold passed.

Meanwhile the dragon, seeing him clean gone,
Followed him not, but crying horribly,
Caught up within her jaws a block of stone
And ground it into powder, then turned she,
With cries that folk could hear far out at sea,
And reached the treasure set apart of old,
To brood above the hidden heaps of gold.

Yet was she seen again on many a day
By some half-waking mariner, or herd,

Playing amid the ripples of the bay,
Or on the hills making all things afeard,
Or in the wood, that did that castle gird,
But never any man again durst go
To seek her woman's form, and end her woe.

As for the man, who knows what things he bore?
What mournful faces peopled the sad night,
What wailings vexed him with reproaches sore,
What images of that nigh-gained delight!
What dreamed caresses from soft hands and white,
Turning to horrors ere they reached the best,
What struggles vain, what shame, what huge unrest?

No man he knew, three days he lay and raved,
And cried for death, until a lethargy
Fell on him, and his fellows thought him saved;
But on the third night he awoke to die;
And at Byzantium doth his body lie
Between two blossoming pomegranate trees,
Within the churchyard of the Genoese.

A MOMENT 'S silence as his tale had end,
And then the wind of that June night did blend
Their varied voices, as of that and this
They fell to talk: of those fair islands' bliss
They knew in other days, of hope they had
To live there long an easy life and glad,
With nought to vex them; and the younger men
Began to nourish strange dreams even then
Of sailing east, as these had once sailed west;
Because the story of that luckless quest
With hope, not fear, had filled their joyous hearts
And made them dream of new and noble parts
That they might act; of raising up the name
Their fathers bore, and winning boundless fame.

These too with little patience seemed to hear,
That story end with shame and grief and fear;
A little thing the man had had to do,
They said, if longing burned within him so.
But at their words the older men must bow
Their heads, and, smiling, somewhat thoughtful grow,
Remembering well how fear in days gone by
Had dealt with them, and poisoned wretchedly
Good days, good deeds, and longings for all good:
Yet on the evil times they would not brood,
But sighing, strove to raise the weight of years,
And no more memory of their hopes and fears
They nourished, but such gentle thoughts as fed
The pensiveness the lovely season bred.

JULY.

FAIR was the morn to-day, the blossom's scent
Floated across the fresh grass, and the bees
With low vexed song from rose to lily went,
A gentle wind was in the heavy trees,
And thine eyes shone with joyous memories;
Fair was the early morn, and fair wert thou,
And I was happy—Ah, be happy now!

Peace and content without us, love within
That hour there was, now thunder and wild rain,
Have wrapped the cowering world, and foolish sin,
And nameless pride, have made us wise in vain;
Ah, love! although the morn shall come again,
And on new rose-buds the new sun shall smile,
Can we regain what we have lost meanwhile?

E'en now the west grows clear of storm and threat,
But midst the lightning did the fair sun die—
—Ah he shall rise again for ages yet,
He cannot waste his life—but thou and I—
Who knows if next morn this felicity
My lips may feel, or if thou still shalt live
This seal of love renewed once more to give?

WITHIN a lovely valley, watered well
With flowery streams, the July feast befell,
And there within the Chief-priest's fair abode
They cast aside their trouble's heavy load,
Scarce made aweary by the sultry day.
The earth no longer laboured; shaded lay
The sweet-breathed kine, across the sunny vale,
From hill to hill the wandering rook did sail,
Lazily croaking, midst his dreams of spring,
Nor more awake the pink-foot dove did cling
Unto the beech-bough, murmuring now and then;
All rested but the restless sons of men
And the great sun that wrought this happiness,
And all the vale with fruitful hopes did bless.

So in a marble chamber bright with flowers,
The old men feasted through the fresher hours,
And at the hottest time of all the day
When now the sun was on his downward way,
Sat listening to a tale an elder told,
New to his fathers while they yet did hold
The cities of some far-off Grecian isle,
Though in the heavens the cloud of force and guile
Was gathering dark that sent them o'er the sea
To win new lands for their posterity.

THE SON OF CRŒSUS.

ARGUMENT.

CRŒSUS, king of Lydia, dreamed that he saw his Son slain by an iron weapon, and though by every means he strove to avert this doom from him, yet thus it happened, for his Son was slain by the hand of the man who seemed least of all likely to do the deed.

OF Crœsus tells my tale, a king of old
In Lydia, ere the Mede fell on the land,
A man made mighty by great heaps of gold,
Feared for the myriads strong of heart and hand
That 'neath his banners wrought out his command,
And though his latter ending fell to ill,
Yet first of every joy he had his fill.

Two sons he had, and one was dumb from birth;
The other one, that Atys had to name,
Grew up a fair youth, and of might and worth,
And well it seemed the race wherefrom he came
From him should never get reproach or shame:
But yet no stroke he struck before his death,
In no war-shout he spent his latest breath.

Now Crœsus, lying on his bed a-night,
Dreamed that he saw this dear son lying low,
And folk lamenting he was slain outright,
And that some iron thing had dealt the blow;
By whose hand guided he could nowise know,
Or if in peace by traitors it were done,
Or in some open war not yet begun.

Three times one night this vision broke his sleep,
So that at last he rose up from his bed,
That he might ponder how he best might keep
The threatened danger from so dear a head;
And, since he now was old enough to wed,
The King sent men to search the lands around,
Until some matchless maiden should be found;

That in her arms this Atys might forget
The praise of men, and fame of history,
Whereby full many a field has been made wet
With blood of men, and many a deep green sea
Been reddened therewithal, and yet shall be;
That her sweet voice might drown the people's praise,
Her eyes make bright the uneventful days.

So when at last a wonder they had brought,
From some sweet land down by the ocean's rim,
Than whom no fairer could by man be thought,
And ancient dames, scanning her limb by limb,
Had said that she was fair enough for him,

To her was Atys married with much show,
And looked to dwell with her in bliss enow.

And in meantime afield he never went,
Either to hunting or the frontier war,
No dart was cast, nor any engine bent
Anigh him, and the Lydian men afar
Must rein their steeds, and the bright blossoms mar
If they have any lust of tourney now,
And in far meadows must they bend the bow.

And also through the palace everywhere
The swords and spears were taken from the wall
That long with honour had been hanging there,
And from the golden pillars of the hall;
Lest by mischance some sacred blade should fall,
And in its falling bring revenge at last
For many a fatal battle overpast.

And every day King Crœsus wrought with care
To save his dear son from that threatened end,
And many a beast he offered up with prayer
Unto the gods, and much of wealth did spend,
That they so prayed might yet perchance defend
That life, until at least that he were dead,
With earth laid heavy on his unseeing head.

But in the midst even of the wedding feast
There came a man, who by the golden hall

Sat down upon the steps, and man or beast
He heeded not, but there against the wall
He leaned his head, speaking no word at all,
Till, with his son and son's wife, came the King,
And then unto his gown the man did cling.

"What man art thou?" the King said to him then,
"That in such guise thou prayest on thy knee;
Hast thou some fell foe here among my men?
Or hast thou done an ill deed unto me?
Or has thy wife been carried over sea?
Or hast thou on this day great need of gold?
Or say, why else thou now art grown so bold."

"O King," he said, "I ask no gold to-day,
And though indeed thy greatness drew me here,
No wrong have I that thou could'st wipe away;
And nought of mine the pirate folk did bear
Across the sea; none of thy folk I fear:
But all the gods are now mine enemies,
Therefore I kneel before thee on my knees.

"For as with mine own brother on a day
Within the running place at home I played,
Unwittingly I smote him in such way
That dead upon the green grass he was laid;
Half-dead myself I fled away dismayed,
Wherefore I pray thee help me in my need,
And purify my soul of this sad deed.

"If of my name and country thou wouldst know,
In Phrygia yet my father is a king,
Gordius, the son of Midas, rich enow
In corn and cattle, golden cup and ring;
And mine own name before I did this thing
Was called Adrastus, whom, in street and hall,
The slayer of his brother men now call."

"Friend," said the King, "have thou no fear of me;
For though, indeed, I am right happy now,
Yet well I know this may not always be,
And I may chance some day to kneel full low,
And to some happy man mine head to bow
With prayers to do a greater thing than this,
Dwell thou with us, and win again thy bliss.

"For in this city men in sport and play
Forget the trouble that the gods have sent;
Who therewithal send wine, and many a may
As fair as she for whom the Trojan went,
And many a dear delight besides have lent,
Which, whoso is well-loved of them shall keep
Till in forgetful death he falls asleep.

"Therefore to-morrow shall those rites be done
That kindred blood demands that thou hast shed,
That if the mouth of thine own mother's son
Did hap to curse thee ere he was quite dead,
The curse may lie the lighter on thy head,

Because the flower-crowned head of many a beast
Has fallen voiceless in our glorious feast."

Then did Adrastus rise and thank the King,
And the next day when yet low was the sun,
The sacrifice and every other thing
That unto these dread rites belonged, was done;
And there Adrastus dwelt, hated of none,
And loved of many, and the King loved him
For brave and wise he was and strong of limb.

But chiefly amongst all did Atys love
The luckless stranger, whose fair tales of war
The Lydian's heart abundantly did move,
And much they talked of wandering afar
Some day, to lands where many marvels are,
With still the Phrygian through all things to be
The leader unto all felicity.

Now at this time folk came unto the King
Who on a forest's borders dwelling were,
Wherein there roamed full many a dangerous thing,
As wolf and wild bull, lion and brown bear;
But chiefly in that forest was the lair
Of a great boar that no man could withstand,
And many a woe he wrought upon the land.

Since long ago that men in Calydon
Held chase, no beast like him had once been seen,

He ruined vineyards lying in the sun,
After his harvesting the men must glean
What he had left; right glad they had not been
Among the tall stalks of the ripening wheat,
The fell destroyer's fatal tusks to meet.

For often would the lonely man entrapped
In vain from his dire fury strive to hide
In some thick hedge, and other whiles it happed
Some careless stranger by his place would ride,
And the tusks smote his fallen horse's side,
And what help then to such a wretch could come
With sword he could not draw, and far from home?

Or else girls, sent their water-jars to fill,
Would come back pale, too terrified to cry,
Because they had but seen him from the hill;
Or else again with side rent wretchedly,
Some hapless damsel midst the brake would lie.
Shortly to say, there neither man nor maid
Was safe afield whether they wrought or played.

Therefore were come these dwellers by the wood
To pray the king brave men to them to send,
That they might live; and if he deemed it good,
That Atys with the other knights should wend,
They thought their grief the easier should have end;
For both by gods and men they knew him loved,
And easily by hope of glory moved.

" O Sire," they said, "thou know'st how Hercules
Was not content to wait till folk asked aid,
But sought the pests among their guarded trees;
Thou know'st what name the Theban Cadmus made,
And how the bull of Marathon was laid
Dead on the fallows of the Athenian land,
And how folk worshipped Atalanta's hand.

" Fair would thy son's name look upon the roll
Wherein such noble deeds as this are told;
And great delight shall surely fill thy soul,
Thinking upon his deeds when thou art old,
And thy brave heart is waxen faint and cold:
Dost thou not know, O King, how men will strive
That they, when dead, still in their sons may live?"

He shuddered as they spoke, because he thought,
Most certainly a winning tale is this
To draw him from the net where he is caught,
For hearts of men grow weary of all bliss;
Nor is he one to be content with his,
If he should hear the trumpet-blast of fame
And far-off people calling on his name.

" Good friends," he said, "go, get ye back again,
And doubt not I will send you men to slay
This pest ye fear: yet shall your prayer be vain
If ye with any other speak to-day;
And for my son, with me he needs must stay,

For mighty cares oppress the Lydian land.
Fear not, for ye shall have a noble band."

And with that promise must they be content,
And so departed, having feasted well.
And yet some god or other ere they went,
If they were silent, this their tale must tell
To more than one man; therefore it befell,
That at the last Prince Atys knew the thing,
And came with angry eyes unto the King.

"Father," he said, "since when am I grown vile?
Since when am I grown helpless of my hands?
Or else what folk, with words enwrought with guile,
Thine ears have poisoned; that when far-off lands
My fame might fill, by thy most strange commands
I needs must stay within this slothful home,
Whereto would God that I had never come?

"What! wilt thou take mine honour quite away?
Wouldst thou, that, as with her I just have wed
I sit among thy folk at end of day,
She should be ever turning round her head
To watch some man for war apparelled,
Because he wears a sword that he may use,
Which grace to me thou ever wilt refuse?

"Or dost thou think, when thou hast run thy race
And thou art gone, and in thy stead I reign,

The people will do honour to my place,
Or that the lords leal men will still remain,
If yet my father's sword be sharp in vain?
If on the wall his armour still hang up,
While for a spear I hold a drinking-cup?"

"O Son!" quoth Crœsus, "well I know thee brave,
And worthy of high deeds of chivalry;
Therefore the more thy dear life would I save,
Which now is threatened by the gods on high;
Three times one night I dreamed I saw thee die,
Slain by some deadly iron-pointed thing,
While weeping lords stood round thee in a ring."

Then loud laughed Atys, and he said again,
"Father, and did this ugly dream tell thee
What day it was on which I should be slain?
As may the gods grant I may one day be,
And not from sickness die right wretchedly,
Groaning with pain, my lords about my bed,
Wishing to God that I were fairly dead;

"But slain in battle, as the Lydian kings
Have died ere now, in some great victory,
While all about the Lydian shouting rings
Death to the beaten foemen as they fly.
What death but this, O father! should I die?
But if my life by iron shall be done,
What steel to-day shall glitter in the sun?

"Yea, father, if to thee it seemeth good
To keep me from the bright steel-bearing throng,
Let me be brave at least within the wood;
For surely, if thy dream be true, no wrong
Can hap to me from this beast's tushes strong:
Unless perchance the beast is grown so wise,
He haunts the forest clad in Lydian guise."

Then Crœsus said: "O Son, I love thee so,
That thou shalt do thy will upon this tide:
But since unto this hunting thou must go,
A trusty friend along with thee shall ride,
Who not for anything shall leave thy side.
I think, indeed, he loves thee well enow
To thrust his heart 'twixt thee and any blow.

"Go then, O Son, and if by some short span
Thy life be measured, how shall it harm thee,
If while life last thou art a happy man?
And thou art happy; only unto me
Is trembling left, and infelicity:
The trembling of the man who loves on earth,
But unto thee is hope and present mirth.

"Nay, be thou not ashamed, for on this day
I fear not much: thou read'st my dream aright,
No teeth or claws shall take thy life away.
And it may chance, ere thy last glorious fight,
I shall be blinded by the endless night;

And brave Adrastus on this day shall be
Thy safeguard, and shall give good heart to me.

"Go then, and send him hither, and depart;
And as the heroes did mayst thou too do,
Winning such fame as well may please thine heart."
With that word from the King did Atys go,
Who, left behind, sighed, saying "May it be so,
Even as I hope; and yet I would to God
These men upon my threshold ne'er had trod."

So when Adrastus to the King was come
He said unto him, "O my Phrygian friend,
We in this land have given you a fair home,
And 'gainst all foes your life will we defend:
Wherefore for us that life thou shouldest spend,
If any day there should be need therefore;
And now a trusty friend I need right sore.

"Doubtless ere now thou hast heard many say
There is a doom that threatens my son's life;
Therefore this place is stript of arms to-day,
And therefore still bides Atys with his wife,
And tempts not any god by raising strife;
Yet none the less by no desire of his,
To whom would war be most abundant bliss.

"And since to-day some glory he may gain
Against a monstrous bestial enemy

And that the meaning of my dream is plain;
That saith that he by steel alone shall die,
His burning wish I may not well deny,
Therefore afield to-morrow doth he wend
And herein mayst thou show thyself my friend—

"For thou as captain of his band shalt ride,
And keep a watchful eye of everything,
Nor leave him whatsoever may betide:
Lo, thou art brave, the son of a great king,
And with thy praises doth this city ring,
Why should I tell thee what a name those gain,
Who dying for their friends, die not in vain."

Then said Adrastus, "Now were I grown base
Beyond all words, if I should spare for aught
In guarding him, so sit with smiling face,
And of this matter take no further thought,
Because with my life shall his life be bought,
If ill should hap; and no ill fate it were,
If I should die for what I hold so dear."

Then went Adrastus, and next morn all things,
That 'longed unto the hunting were well dight,
And forth they went clad as the sons of kings,
Fair was the morn, as through the sunshine bright
They rode, the prince half-wild with great delight
The Phrygian smiling on him soberly,
And ever looking round with watchful eye.

So through the city all the rout rode fast,
With many a great black-muzzled yellow hound
And then the teeming country-side they passed,
Until they came to sour and rugged ground,
And there rode up a little heathy mound,
That overlooked the scrubby woods and low,
That of the beast's lair somewhat they might know.

And there a good man of the country-side
Showed them the places where he mostly lay;
And they, descending, through the wood did ride,
And followed on his tracks for half the day.
And at the last they brought him well to bay,
Within an oozy space amidst the wood,
About the which a ring of alders stood.

So when the hounds' changed voices clear they heard,
With hearts aflame on towards him straight they drew;
Atys the first of all, of nought afeard,
Except that folk should say some other slew
The beast; and lustily his horn he blew,
Going afoot; then, mighty spear in hand,
Adrastus headed all the following band.

Now when they came unto the plot of ground
Where stood the boar, hounds dead about him lay
Or sprawled about, bleeding from many a wound,
But still the others held him well at bay,
Nor had he been bestead thus ere that day.

But yet, seeing Atys, straight he rushed at him,
Speckled with foam, bleeding in flank and limb.

Then Atys stood and cast his well-steeled spear
With a great shout, and straight and well it flew;
For now the broad blade cutting through the ear,
A stream of blood from out the shoulder drew.
And therewithal another, no less true,
Adrastus cast, whereby the boar had died:
But Atys drew the bright sword from his side,

And to the tottering beast he drew anigh:
But as the sun's rays ran adown the blade
Adrastus threw a javelin hastily,
For of the mighty beast was he afraid,
Lest by his wounds he should not yet be stayed,
But with a last rush cast his life away,
And dying there, the son of Crœsus slay.

But even as the feathered dart he hurled,
His strained, despairing eyes, beheld the end,
And changed seemed all the fashion of the world,
And past and future into one did blend,
As he beheld the fixed eyes of his friend,
That no reproach had in them, and no fear,
For Death had seized him ere he thought him near.

Adrastus shrieked, and running up he caught
The falling man, and from his bleeding side

Drew out the dart, and seeing that death had brought
Deliverance to him, he thereby had died;
But ere his hand the luckless steel could guide,
And he the refuge of poor souls could win,
The horror-stricken huntsmen had rushed in.

And these, with blows and cries he heeded nought,
His unresisting hands made haste to bind;
Then of the alder-boughs a bier they wrought,
And laid the corpse thereon, and 'gan to wind
Homeward amidst the tangled wood and blind,
And going slowly, at the eventide,
Some leagues from Sardis did that day abide.

Onward next morn the slaughtered man they bore,
With him that slew him, and at end of day
They reached the city, and with mourning sore
Toward the king's palace did they take their way.
He in an open western chamber lay
Feasting, though inwardly his heart did burn
Until that Atys should to him return.

And when those wails first smote upon his ear
He set the wine-cup down, and to his feet
He rose, and bitter all-consuming fear
Swallowed his joy, and nigh he went to meet
That which was coming through the weeping street:
But in the end he thought it good to wait,
And stood there doubting all the ills of fate.

But when at last up to that royal place
Folk brought the thing he once had held so dear,
Still stood the King, staring with ghastly face
As they brought forth Adrastus and the bier,
But spoke at last, slowly without a tear,
" O Phrygian man, that I did purify,
Is it through thee that Atys came to die?"

" O King," Adrastus said, " take now my life,
With whatso torment seemeth good to thee,
As my word went, for I would end this strife,
And underneath the earth lie quietly;
Nor is it my will here alive to be:
For as my brother, so Prince Atys died,
And this unlucky hand some god did guide."

Then as a man constrained, the tale he told
From end to end, nor spared himself one whit:
And as he spoke, the wood did still behold,
The trodden grass, and Atys dead on it;
And many a change o'er the King's face did flit
Of kingly rage, and hatred and despair,
As on the slayer's face he still did stare.

At last he said, "Thy death avails me nought,
The gods themselves have done this bitter deed,
That I was all too happy was their thought,
Therefore thy heart is dead and mine doth bleed,
And I am helpless as a trodden weed:

Thou art but as the handle of the spear,
The caster sits far off from any fear.

"Yet, if thy hurt they meant, I can do this,—.
—Loose him and let him go in peace from me:—
I will not slay the slayer of all my bliss;
Yet go, poor man, for when thy face I see
I curse the gods for their felicity.
Surely some other slayer they would have found,
If thou hadst long ago been under ground.

"Alas, Adrastus! in my inmost heart
I knew the gods would one day do this thing,
But deemed indeed that it would be thy part
To comfort me amidst my sorrowing;
Make haste to go, for I am still a King!
Madness may take me, I have many hands
Who will not spare to do my worst commands."

With that Adrastus' bonds were done away,
And forthwith to the city gates he ran,
And on the road where they had been that day
Rushed through the gathering night; and some lone man
Beheld next day his visage wild and wan,
Peering from out a thicket of the wood
Where he had spilt that well-beloved blood.

And now the day of burial pomp must be,
And to those rites all lords of Lydia came

About the King, and that day, they and he
Cast royal gifts of rich things on the flame;
But while they stood and wept, and called by name
Upon the dead, amidst them came a man
With raiment rent, and haggard face and wan:

Who when the marshals would have thrust him out
And men looked strange on him, began to say,
"Surely the world is changed since ye have doubt
Of who I am; nay, turn me not away,
For ye have called me princely ere to-day—
Adrastus, son of Gordius a great King,
Where unto Pallas Phrygian maidens sing.

"O Lydians, many a rich thing have ye cast
Into this flame, but I myself will give
A greater gift, since now I see at last
The gods are wearied for that still I live,
And with their will, why should I longer strive?
Atys, O Atys, thus I give to thee
A life that lived for thy felicity."

And therewith from his side a knife he drew,
And, crying out, upon the pile he leapt,
And with one mighty stroke himself he slew.
So there these princes both together slept,
And their light ashes, gathered up, were kept
Within a golden vessel wrought all o'er
With histories of this hunting of the boar.

A GENTLE wind had risen midst his tale,
That bore the sweet scents of the fertile vale
In at the open windows; and these men
The burden of their years scarce noted then,
Soothed by the sweet luxurious summer time,
And by the cadence of that ancient rhyme,
Spite of its saddening import; nay, indeed,
Of some such thoughts the Wanderers had need
As that tale gave them—Yea, a man shall be
A wonder for his glorious chivalry,
First in all wisdom, of a prudent mind,
Yet none the less him too his fate shall find
Unfenced by these, a man 'mongst other men.
Yea, and will Fortune pick out, now and then,
The noblest for the anvil of her blows;
Great names are few, and yet, indeed, who knows
What greater souls have fallen 'neath the stroke
Of careless fate? Purblind are most of folk,
The happy are the masters of the earth
Which ever give small heed to hapless worth;
So goes the world, and this we needs must bear
Like eld and death: yet there were some men there
Who drank in silence to the memory
Of those who failed on earth great men to be,
Though better than the men who won the crown.

But when the sun was fairly going down
They left the house, and, following up the stream,
In the low sun saw the kingfisher gleam
Twixt bank and alder, and the grebe steal out
From the high sedge, and, in his restless doubt,
Dive down, and rise to see what men were there;
They saw the swallow chase high up in air
The circling gnats; the shaded dusky pool
Broke by the splashing chub; the ripple cool,
Rising and falling, of some distant weir
They heard, till it oppressed the listening ear,
As twilight grew: so back they turned again
Glad of their rest, and pleasure after pain.

WITHIN the gardens once again they met,
That now the roses did well nigh-forget,
For hot July was drawing to an end,
And August came the fainting year to mend
With fruit and grain; so 'neath the trellises,
Nigh blossomless, did they lie well at ease,
And watched the poppies burn across the grass,
And o'er the bindweed's bells the brown bee pass
Still murmuring of his gains: windless and bright
The morn had been, to help their dear delight;
But heavy clouds ere noon grew round the sun,
And, halfway to the zenith, wild and dun
The sky grew, and the thunder growled afar;
But, ere the steely clouds began their war,
A change there came, and, as by some great hand,
The clouds that hung in threatening o'er the land
Were drawn away; then a light wind arose
That shook the light stems of that flowery close,
And made men sigh for pleasure; therewithal
Did mirth upon the feasting elders fall,
And they no longer watched the lowering sky,
But called aloud for some new history.

Then spoke the Suabian, "Sirs, this tale is told
Among our searchers for fine stones and gold,
And though I tell it wrong be good to me;
For I the written book did never see,
Made by some Fleming, as I think, wherein
Is told this tale of wilfulness and sin."

THE

WATCHING OF THE FALCON.

ARGUMENT.

THE case of this Falcon was such, that whoso watched it without sleeping for seven days and seven nights, had his first wish granted him by a fay lady, that appeared to him thereon; and some wished one thing, and some another. But a certain King, who watched the Falcon daily, would wish for nought but the love of that fay; which wish being accomplished, was afterwards his ruin.

ACROSS the sea a land there is,
Where, if fate will, may men have bliss,
For it is fair as any land:
There hath the reaper a full hand,
While in the orchard hangs aloft
The purple fig, a-growing soft;
And fair the trellised vine-bunches
Are swung across the high elm-trees;
And in the rivers great fish play,
While over them pass day by day
The laden barges to their place.
There maids are straight, and fair of face,

And men are stout for husbandry,
And all is well as it can be
Upon this earth where all has end.
For on them God is pleased to send
The gift of Death down from above,
That envy, hatred, and hot love,
Knowledge with hunger by his side,
And avarice and deadly pride,
There may have end like everything
Both to the shepherd and the king:
Lest this green earth become but hell
If folk thereon should ever dwell.
Full little most men think of this,
But half in woe and half in bliss
They pass their lives, and die at last
Unwilling, though their lot be cast
In wretched places of the earth,
Where men have little joy from birth
Until they die; in no such case
Were those who tilled this pleasant place.
There soothly men were loth to die,
Though sometimes in his misery
A man would say "Would I were dead!"
Alas! full little likelihead
That he should live for ever there.
So folk within that country fair
Lived on, nor from their memories drave
The thought of what they could not have,
And without need tormented still

Each other with some bitter ill;
Yea, and themselves too, growing grey
With dread of some long-lingering day,
That never came ere they were dead
With green sods growing on the head;
Nowise content with what they had,
But falling still from good to bad
While hard they sought the hopeless best;
And seldom happy or at rest
Until at last with lessening blood
One foot within the grave they stood.

Now so it chanced that in this land
There did a certain castle stand,
Set all alone deep in the hills,
Amid the sound of falling rills
Within a valley of sweet grass,
To which there went one narrow pass
Through the dark hills, but seldom trod.
Rarely did horse-hoof press the sod
About the quiet weedy moat,
Where unscared did the great fish float;
Because men dreaded there to see
The uncouth things of faërie;
Nathless by some few fathers old
These tales about the place were told
That neither squire nor seneschal
Or varlet came in bower or hall,
Yet all things were in order due,

Hangings of gold and red and blue,
And tables with fair service set;
Cups that had paid the Cæsar's debt
Could he have laid his hands on them;
Dorsars, with pearls in every hem,
And fair embroidered gold-wrought things,
Fit for a company of kings;
And in the chambers dainty beds,
With pillows dight for fair young heads;
And horses in the stables were,
And in the cellars wine full clear
And strong, and casks of ale and mead;
Yea, all things a great lord could need.
For whom these things were ready there
None knew; but if one chanced to fare
Into that place at Easter-tide,
There would he find a falcon tied
Unto a pillar of the Hall;
And such a fate to him would fall,
That if unto the seventh night,
He watched the bird from dark to light,
And light to dark unceasingly,
On the last evening he should see
A lady beautiful past words;
Then, were he come of clowns or lords,
Son of a swineherd or a king,
There must she grant him anything
Perforce, that he might dare to ask,
And do his very hardest task.

But if he slumbered, ne'er again
The wretch would wake for he was slain
Helpless, by hands he could not see,
And his corpse mangled wretchedly.

Now said these elders—Ere this tide
Full many folk this thing have tried,
But few have got much good thereby;
For first, a many came to die
By slumbering ere their watch was done;
Or else they saw that lovely one,
And mazed, they knew not what to say;
Or asked for some small thing that day
That easily they might have won,
Nor staked their lives and souls thereon;
Or asking, asked for some great thing
That was their bane; as to be king
One asked, and died the morrow morn
That he was crowned, of all forlorn.
Yet thither came a certain man,
Who from being poor great riches wan
Past telling, whose grandsons now are
Great lords thereby in peace and war.
And in their coat-of-arms they bear,
Upon a field of azure fair,
A castle and a falcon, set
Below a chief of golden fret.
And in our day a certain knight
Prayed to be worsted in no fight,

And so it happed to him : yet he
Died none the less most wretchedly,
And all his prowess was in vain,
For by a losel was he slain,
As on the highway side he slept
One summer night, of no man kept.

Such tales as these the fathers old
About that lonely castle told ;
And in their day the king must try
Himself to prove that mystery,
Although, unless the fay could give
For ever on the earth to live,
Nought could he ask that he had not :
For boundless riches had he got,
Fair children, and a faithful wife ;
And happily had passed his life,
And all fulfilled of victory,
Yet was he fain this thing to see.
So towards the mountains he set out
One noontide, with a gallant rout
Of knights and lords, and as the day
Began to fail came to the way
Where he must enter all alone,
Between the dreary walls of stone.
Thereon to that fair company
He bade farewell, who wistfully
Looked backward oft as home they rode.
But in the entry he abode

Of that rough unknown narrowing pass,
Where twilight at the high noon was.
Then onward he began to ride:
Smooth rose the rocks on every side,
And seemed as they were cut by man;
Adown them ever water ran,
But they of living things were bare,
Yea, not a blade of grass grew there;
And underfoot rough was the way,
For scattered all about there lay
Great jagged pieces of black stone.
Throughout the pass the wind did moan,
With such wild noises, that the King
Could almost think he heard something
Spoken of men; as one might hear
The voices of folk standing near
One's chamber wall: yet saw he nought
Except those high walls strangely wrought,
And overhead the strip of sky.
So, going onward painfully,
He met therein no evil thing,
But came about the sunsetting
Unto the opening of the pass,
And thence beheld a vale of grass
Bright with the yellow daffodil;
And all the vale the sun did fill
With his last glory. Midmost there
Rose up a stronghold, built four-square,
Upon a flowery grassy mound,

That moat and high wall ran around.
Thereby he saw a walled pleasance,
With walks and sward fit for the dance
Of Arthur's court in its best time,
That seemed to feel some magic clime;
For though through all the vale outside
Things were as in the April-tide,
And daffodils and cowslips grew
And hidden the March violets blew,
Within the bounds of that sweet close
Was trellised the bewildering rose;
There was the lily over-sweet,
And starry pinks for garlands meet;
And apricots hung on the wall
And midst the flowers did peaches fall,
And nought had blemish there or spot,
For in that place decay was not.

Silent awhile the King abode
Beholding all, then on he rode
And to the castle-gate drew nigh,
Till fell the drawbridge silently,
And when across it he did ride
He found the great gates open wide,
And entered there, but as he passed
The gates were shut behind him fast,
But not before that he could see
The drawbridge rise up silently.
Then round he gazed oppressed with awe,

And there no living thing he saw
Except the sparrows in the eaves,
As restless as light autumn leaves
Blown by the fitful rainy wind.
Thereon his final goal to find,
He lighted off his war-horse good
And let him wander as he would,
When he had eased him of his gear;
Then gathering heart against his fear.
Just at the silent end of day
Through the fair porch he took his way,
And found at last a goodly hall
With glorious hangings on the wall,
Inwrought with trees of every clime,
And stories of the ancient time,
But all of sorcery they were.
For o'er the daïs Venus fair,
Fluttered about by many a dove,
Made hopeless men for hopeless love,
Both sick and sorry; there they stood
Wrought wonderfully in various mood,
But wasted all by that hid fire
Of measureless o'er-sweet desire,
And let the hurrying world go by
Forgetting all felicity.
But down the hall the tale was wrought
How Argo in old time was brought
To Colchis for the fleece of gold.
And on the other side was told

How mariners for long years came
To Circe, winning grief and shame.
Until at last by hardihead
And craft, Ulysses won her-bed.

Long upon these the King did look
And of them all good heed he took;
To see if they would tell him aught
About the matter that he sought,
But all were of the times long past;
So going all about, at last
When grown nigh weary of his search
A falcon on a silver perch,
Anigh the daïs did he see,
And wondered, because certainly
At his first coming 'twas not there;
But 'neath the bird a scroll most fair,
With golden letters on the white
He saw, and in the dim twilight
By diligence could he read this:—

"*Ye who have not enow of bliss,*
And in this hard world labour sore,
By manhood here may get you more,
And be fulfilled of everything,
Till ye be masters of the King.
And yet, since I who promise this
Am nowise God to give man bliss
Past ending, now in time beware,
And if you live in little care

At this time get you back again,
Lest unknown woe you chance to gain
In wishing for a thing untried."

A little while did he abide,
When he had read this, deep in thought,
Wondering indeed if there were aught
He had not got, that a wise man
Would wish; yet in his mind it ran
That he might win a boundless realm,
Yea, come to wear upon his helm
The crown of the whole conquered earth;
That all who lived thereon, from birth
To death should call him King and Lord,
And great kings tremble at his word,
Until in turn he came to die.
Therewith a little did he sigh,
But thought, "Of Alexander yet
Men talk, nor would they e'er forget
My name, if this should come to be,
Whoever should come after me:
But while I lay wrapped round with gold
Should tales and histories manifold
Be written of me, false and true;
And as the time still onward drew
Almost a god would folk count me,
Saying, 'In our time none such be.'"
But therewith did he sigh again,
And said, "Ah, vain, and worse than vain!

For though the world forget me nought,
Yet by that time should I be brought
Where all the world I should forget,
And bitterly should I regret
That I, from godlike great renown,
To helpless death must fall adown:
How could I bear to leave it all?"
Then straight upon his mind did fall
Thoughts of old longings half forgot,
Matters for which his heart was hot
A while ago: whereof no more
He cared for some, and some right sore
Had vexed him, being fulfilled at last.
And when the thought of these had passed
Still something was there left behind,
That by no torturing of his mind
Could he in any language name,
Or into form of wishing frame.

At last he thought, "What matters it,
Before these seven days shall flit
Some great thing surely shall I find,
That gained will not leave grief behind,
Nor turn to deadly injury.
So now will I let these things be
And think of some unknown delight."

Now, therewithal, was come the night,
And thus his watch was well begun;

And till the rising of the sun,
Waking, he paced about the hall,
And saw the hangings on the wall
Fade into nought, and then grow white
In patches by the pale moonlight,
And then again fade utterly
As still the moonbeams passed them by;
Then in a while, with hope of day,
Begin a little to grow grey,
Until familiar things they grew,
As up at last the great sun drew,
And lit them with his yellow light
At ending of another night.

Then right glad was he of the day,
That passed with him in such like way;
For neither man nor beast came near,
Nor any voices did he hear.
And when again it drew to night
Silent it passed, till first twilight
Of morning came, and then he heard
The feeble twittering of some bird,
That, in that utter silence drear,
Smote harsh and startling on his ear.

Therewith came on that lonely day
That passed him in no other way;
And thus six days and nights went by
And nothing strange had come anigh.

And on that day he well-nigh deemed
That all that story had been dreamed.

Daylight and dark, and night and day,
Passed ever in their wonted way;
The wind played in the trees outside,
The rooks from out the high trees cried;
And all seemed natural and fair,
With little signs of magic there.
Yet neither could he quite forget
That close with summer blossoms set,
And fruit hung on trees blossoming,
When all about was early spring.
Yea, if all this by man were made,
Strange was it that still undecayed
The food lay on the tables still
Unchanged by man, that wine did fill
The golden cups, still bright and red.
And all was so apparelled
For guests that came not, yet was all
As though that servants filled the hall.
So waxed and waned his hopes, and still
He formed no wish for good or ill.
And while he thought of this and that
Upon his perch the falcon sat
Unfed, unhooded, his bright eyes
Beholders of the hard-earned prize,
Glancing around him restlessly,
As though he knew the time drew nigh
When this long watching should be done.

So little by little fell the sun,

From high noon unto sun-setting;
And in that lapse of time the King,
Though still he woke, yet none the less
Was dreaming in his sleeplessness
Of this and that which he had done
Before this watch he had begun;
Till, with a start, he looked at last
About him, and all dreams were past;
For now, though it was past twilight
Without, within all grew as bright
As when the noon-sun smote the wall,
Though no lamp shone within the hall.

Then rose the King upon his feet,
And well-nigh heard his own heart beat,
And grew all pale for hope and fear,
As sound of footsteps caught his ear
But soft, and as some fair lady,
Going as gently as might be,
Stopped now and then awhile, distraught
By pleasant wanderings of sweet thought.

Nigher the sound came, and more nigh,
Until the King unwittingly
Trembled, and felt his hair arise,
But on the door still kept his eyes.
That opened soon, and in the light
There stepped alone a lady bright,
And made straight toward him up the hall.

In golden garments was she clad
And round her waist a belt she had

Of emeralds fair, and from her feet,
That shod with gold the floor did meet,
She held the raiment daintily,
And on her golden head had she
A rose-wreath round a pearl-wrought crown,
Softly she walked with eyes cast down,
Nor looked she any other than
An earthly lady, though no man
Has seen so fair a thing as she.

So when her face the King could see
Still more he trembled, and he thought
"Surely my wish is hither brought,
And this will be a goodly day
If for mine own I win this may."
And therewithal she drew anear
Until the trembling King could hear
Her very breathing, and she raised
Her head and on the King's face gazed
With serious eyes, and stopping there,
Swept from her shoulders her long hair,
And let her gown fall on her feet,
Then spoke in a clear voice and sweet.

"Well hast thou watched, so now O King,
Be bold, and wish for some good thing;
And yet, I counsel thee, be wise.
Behold, spite of these lips and eyes,
Hundreds of years old now am I
And have seen joy and misery.
And thou, who yet hast lived in bliss,

I bid thee well consider this;
Better it were that men should live
As beasts, and take what earth can give,
The air, the warm sun and the grass
Until unto the earth they pass,
And gain perchance nought worse than rest,
Than that not knowing what is best
For sons of men, they needs must thirst
For what shall make their lives accurst.
"Therefore I bid thee now beware,
Lest getting something seeming fair,
Thou com'st in vain to long for more;
Or lest the thing thou wishest for
Make thee unhappy till thou diest,
Or lest with speedy death thou buyest
A little hour of happiness
Or lazy joy with sharp distress.
"Alas, why say I this to thee,
For now I see full certainly,
That thou wilt ask for such a thing,
It had been best for thee to fling
Thy body from a mountain top,
Or in a white hot fire to drop,
Or ever thou hadst seen me here,
Nay then be speedy and speak clear."
Then the king cried out eagerly,
Grown fearless, "Ah, be kind to me!
Thou knowest what I long for then!
Thou know'st that I, a king of men,

Will ask for nothing else than thee!
Thou didst not say this could not be,
And I have had enow of bliss,
If I may end my life with this."
"Hearken," she said, "what men will say
When they are mad; before to-day
I knew that words such things could mean,
And wondered that it could have been.
"Think well, because this wished-for joy,
That surely will thy bliss destroy,
Will let thee live, until thy life
Is wrapped in such bewildering strife
That all thy days will seem but ill—
Now wilt thou wish for this thing still?"
"Wilt thou then grant it?" cried the King;
"Surely thou art an earthly thing,
And all this is but mockery,
And thou canst tell no more than I
What ending to my life shall be."
"Nay, then," she said, "I grant it thee
Perforce; come nigh, for I am thine
Until the morning sun doth shine,
And only coming time can prove
What thing I am."
Dizzy with love,
And with surprise struck motionless
That this divine thing, with far less
Of striving than a village maid,
Had yielded, there he stood afraid,

Spite of hot words and passionate,
And strove to think upon his fate.

But as he stood there, presently
With smiling face she drew anigh,
And on his face he felt her breath.
"O love," she said, "dost thou fear death?
Not till next morning shalt thou die,
Or fall into thy misery."
Then on his hand her hand did fall,
And forth she led him down the hall,
Going full softly by his side.
"O love," she said, "now well betide
The day whereon thou cam'st to me.
I would this night a year might be,
Yea, life-long; such life as we have,
A thousand years from womb to grave."

And then that clinging hand seemed worth
Whatever joy was left on earth,
And every trouble he forgot,
And time and death remembered not:
Kinder she grew, she clung to him
With loving arms, her eyes did swim
With love and pity, as he strove
To show the wisdom of his love;
With trembling lips she praised his choice,
And said, "Ah, well may'st thou rejoice,

Well may'st thou think this one short night
Worth years of other men's delight,
If thy own heart as my heart is,
Sunk in a boundless sea of bliss;
O love, rejoice with me! rejoice!"
  But as she spoke, her honied voice
Trembled, and midst of sobs she said,
"O love, and art thou still afraid?
Return, then, to thine happiness,
Nor will I love thee any less;
But watch thee as a mother might
Her child at play."
  With strange delight
He stammered out, "Nay, keep thy tears
For me, and for my ruined years
Weep love, that I may love thee more,
My little hour will soon be o'er."
  "Ah, love," she said, "and thou art wise
As men are, with long miseries
Buying these idle words and vain,
My foolish love, with lasting pain;
And yet, thou wouldst have died at last
If in all wisdom thou hadst passed
Thy weary life: forgive me then,
In pitying the sad life of men."
  Then in such bliss his soul did swim,
But tender music unto him
Her words were; death and misery
But empty names were grown to be,

As from that place his steps she drew,
And dark the hall behind them grew.

BUT end comes to all earthly bliss,
And by his choice full short was his;
And in the morning, grey and cold,
Beside the daïs did she hold
His trembling hand, and wistfully
He, doubting what his fate should be,
Gazed at her solemn eyes, that now,
Beneath her calm, untroubled brow,
Were fixed on his wild face and wan;
At last she said, "Oh, hapless man,
Depart! your full wish you have had;
A little time you have been glad,
You shall be sorry till you die.
"And though, indeed, full fain am I
This might not be; nathless, as day
Night follows, colourless and grey,
So this shall follow your delight,
Your joy hath ending with last night—
Nay, peace, and hearken to your fate.
"Strife without peace, early and late,
Lasting long after you are dead,
And laid with earth upon your head;
War without victory shall you have

Defeat, nor honour shall you save;
Your fair land shall be rent and torn,
Your people be of all forlorn,
And all men curse you for this thing."
She loosed his hand, but yet the King
Said, "Yea, and I may go with thee?
Why should we part? then let things be
E'en as they will!" "Poor man," she said,
"Thou ravest; our hot love is dead,
If ever it had any life:
Go, make thee ready for the strife
Wherein thy life shall soon be wrapped;
And of the things that here have happed
Make thou such joy as thou may'st do;
But I from this place needs must go,
Nor shalt thou ever see me more
Until thy troubled life is o'er:
Alas! to say 'farewell' to thee
Were nought but bitter mockery.
Fare as thou may'st, and with good heart
Play to the end thy wretched part."

Therewith she turned and went from him,
And with such pain his eyes did swim
He scarce could see her leave the place.
And then, with troubled and pale face,
He gat him thence: and soon he found
His good horse in the base-court bound;
So, loosing him, forth did he ride,

For the great gates were open wide,
And flat the heavy draw-bridge lay.

So by the middle of the day,
That murky pass had he gone through,
And come to country that he knew;
And homeward turned his horse's head,
And passing village and homestead
Nigh to his palace came at last;
And still the further that he passed
From that strange castle of the fays,
More dreamlike seemed those seven days,
And dreamlike the delicious night;
And like a dream the shoulders white,
And clinging arms and yellow hair,
And dreamlike the sad morning there.
Until at last he 'gan to deem
That all might well have been a dream—
Yet why was life a weariness?
What meant this sting of sharp distress?
This longing for a hopeless love,
No sighing from his heart could move?

Or else, 'she did not come and go
As fays might do, but soft and slow
Her lovely feet fell on the floor;
She set her fair hand to the door
As any dainty maid might do;
And though, indeed, there are but few

Beneath the sun as fair as she,
She seemed a fleshly thing to be.
Perchance a merry mock this is,
And I may some day have the bliss
To see her lovely face again,
As smiling she makes all things plain.
And then as I am still a king,
With me may she make tarrying
Full long, yea, till I come to die.'
Therewith at last being come anigh
Unto his very palace gate,
He saw his knights and squires wait
His coming, therefore on the ground
He lighted, and they flocked around
Till he should tell them of his fare.
Then mocking said he, "Ye may dare,
The worst man of you all, to go
And watch as I was bold to do;
For nought I heard except the wind,
And nought I saw to call to mind."
So said he, but they noted well
That something more he had to tell
If it had pleased him; one old man,
Beholding his changed face and wan,
Muttered, "Would God it might be so!
Alas! I fear what fate may do;
Too much good fortune hast thou had
By anything to be more glad
Than thou hast been, I fear thee then

Lest thou becom'st a curse to men."
But to his place the doómed King passed,
And all remembrance strove to cast
From out his mind of that past day,
And spent his life in sport and play.

GREAT among other kings, I said
He was before he first was led
Unto that castle of the fays,
But soon he lost his happy days
And all his goodly life was done.
And first indeed his best-loved son,
The very apple of his eye,
Waged war against him bitterly;
And when this son was overcome
And taken, and folk led him home,
And him the King had gone to meet,
Meaning with gentle words and sweet
To win him to his love again,
By his own hand he found him slain.
I know not if the doomed King yet
Remembered the fay lady's threat,
But troubles upon troubles came:
His daughter next was brought to shame,
Who unto all eyes seemed to be
The image of all purity,

And fleeing from the royal place
The King no more beheld her face.
Then next a folk that came from far
Sent to the King great threats of war,
But he, full-fed of victory,
Deemed this a little thing to be,
And thought the troubles of his home
Thereby he well might overcome
Amid the hurry of the fight.

His foemen seemed of little might,
Although they thronged like summer bees
About the outlying villages,
And on the land great ruin brought.
Well, he this barbarous people sought
With such an army as seemed meet
To put the world beneath his feet;
The day of battle came, and he,
Flushed with the hope of victory,
Grew happy, as he had not been
Since he those glorious eyes had seen.

They met,—his solid ranks of steel
There scarcely more the darts could feel
Of those new foemen, than if they
Had been a hundred miles away:—
They met,—a storied folk were his
To whom sharp war had long been bliss,
A thousand years of memories
Were flashing in their shielded eyes;
And grave philosophers they had

To bid them ever to be glad
To meet their death and get life done
Midst glorious deeds from sire to son.
And those they met were beasts, or worse,
To whom life seemed a jest, a curse;
Of fame and name they had not heard;
Honour to them was but a word,
A word spoke in another tongue;
No memories round their banners clung,
No walls they knew, no art of war,
By hunger were they driven afar
Unto the place whereon they stood,
Hungry for bestial joys and blood.

No wonder if these barbarous men
Were slain by hundreds to each ten
Of the King's brave well-armoured folk,
No wonder if their charges broke
To nothing, on the walls of steel,
And back the baffled hordes must reel.
So stood throughout a summer day
Scarce touched the King's most fair array,
Yet as it drew to even-tide
The foe still surged on every side,
As hopeless hunger-bitten men,
About his folk grown wearied then.
Therewith the King beheld that crowd
Howling and dusk, and cried aloud,
"What do ye, soldiers? and how long

Shall weak folk hold in check the strong.
Nay, forward banners! end the day
And show these folk how brave men play."
The young knights shouted at his word,
But the old folk in terror heard
The shouting run adown the line,
And saw men flush as if with wine—
"O Sire" they said "the day is sure,
Nor will these folk the night endure
Beset with misery and fears."
Alas! they spoke to heedless ears;
For scarce one look on them he cast
But forward through the ranks he passed,
And cried out, "Who will follow me
To win a fruitful victory?"
And toward the foe in haste he spurred,
And at his back their shouts he heard,
Such shouts as he ne'er heard again.

They met—ere moonrise all the plain
Was filled by men in hurrying flight
The relics of that shameful fight;
The close array, the full-armed men,
The ancient fame availed not then,
The dark night only was a friend
To bring that slaughter to an end;
And surely there the King had died,
But driven by that back-rushing tide
Against his will he needs must flee;

And as he pondered bitterly
On all that wreck that he had wrought,
From time to time indeed he thought
Of the fay woman's dreadful threat.

"But everything was not lost yet;"
Next day he said, great was the rout
And shameful beyond any doubt,
But since indeed at eventide
The rout began, not many died,
And gathering all the stragglers now
His troops still made a gallant show—
Alas! it was a show indeed;
Himself desponding, did he lead
His beaten men against the foe,
Thinking at least to lie alow
Before the final rout should be;
But scarce upon the enemy
Could these, whose shaken banners shook
The frightened world, now dare to look;
Nor yet could the doomed King die there
A death he once had held most fair;
Amid unwounded men he came
Back to his city, bent with shame,
Unkingly, midst his great distress,
Yea, weeping at the bitterness
Of women's curses that did greet
His passage down the troubled street.
But sight of all the things they loved,

The memory of their manhood moved
Within the troops, and aged men
And boys must think of battle then,
And men that had not seen the foe
Must clamour to the war to go.
So a great army poured once more
From out the city, and before
The very gates they fought again,
But their late valour was in vain;
They died indeed, and that was good,
But nought they gained for all the blood
Poured out like water; for the foe,
Men might have stayed a while ago,
A match for very gods were grown,
So like the field in June-tide mown
The king's men fell, and but in vain
The remnant strove the town to gain;
Whose battlements were nought to stay
An untaught foe upon that day,
Though many a tale the annals told
Of sieges in the days of old,
When all the world then knew of war
From that fair place was driven afar.

As for the King, a charmed life
He seemed to bear; from out that strife
He came unhurt, and he could see,
As down the valley he did flee
With his most wretched company,

His palace flaming to the sky.
Then in the very midst of woe
His yearning thoughts would backward go
Unto the castle of the fay;
He muttered, "Shall I curse that day,
The last delight that I have had,
For certainly I then was glad?
And who knows if what men call bliss
Had been much better now than this
When I am hastening to the end."
That fearful rest, that dreaded friend,
That Death, he did not gain as yet;
A band of men he soon did get,
A ruined rout of bad and good,
With whom within the tangled wood,
The rugged mountain, he abode,
And thenceforth oftentimes they rode
Into the fair land once called his,
And yet but little came of this,
Except more woe for Heaven to see
Some little added misery
Unto that miserable realm:
The barbarous foe did overwhelm
The cities and the fertile plain,
And many a peaceful man was slain,
And many a maiden brought to shame,
And yielded towns were set aflame;
For all the land was masterless.
Long dwelt the King in great distress

From wood to mountain ever tost,
Mourning for all that he had lost,
Until it chanced upon a day,
Asleep in early morn he lay,
And in a vision there did see
Clad all in black, that fay lady
Whereby all this had come to pass,
But dim as in a misty glass:
She said "I come thy death to tell
Yet now to thee may say 'farewell,'
For in a short space wilt thou be
Within an endless dim country
Where thou mayest well win woe or bliss."
Therewith she stooped his lips to kiss
And vanished straightway from his sight.
So waking there he sat upright
And looked around, but nought could see
And heard but song-birds' melody,
For it was the first hour of day.

Then with a sigh adown he lay
And slept, nor ever woke again,
For that same hour was he slain
By stealthy traitors as he slept.
He of a few was much bewept,
But of most men was well forgot
While that town's ashes still were hot
The foeman on that day did burn.

As for the land, great Time did turn
The bloody fields to deep green grass,
And from the minds of men did pass
The memory of that time of woe,
And at this day all things are so
As first I said; a land it is
Where men may dwell in rest and bliss
If so they will—Who yet will not,
Because their hasty hearts are hot
With foolish hate, and longing vain
The sire and dam of grief and pain.

NEATH the bright sky cool grew the weary earth,
And many a bud in that fair hour had birth
Upon the garden bushes; in the west
The sky got ready for the great sun's rest,
And all was fresh and lovely; none the less
Although those old men shared the happiness
Of the bright eve, 'twas mixed with memories
Of how they might in old times have been wise,
Not casting by for very wilfulness
What wealth might come their changing life to bless;
Lulling their hearts to sleep, amid the cold
Of bitter times, that so they might behold
Some joy at last, e'en if it lingered long.
That, wearing not their souls with grief and wrong,
They still might watch the changing world go by,
Content to live, content at last to die.

Alas! if they had reached content at last,
It was perforce when all their strength was past;
And after loss of many days once bright,
With foolish hopes of unattained delight.

AUGUST.

ACROSS the gap made by our English hinds,
Amidst the Roman's handiwork, behold
Far off the long-roofed church; the shepherd binds
The withy round the hurdles of his fold;
Down in the foss the river fed of old,
That through long lapse of time has grown to be
The little grassy valley that you see.

Rest here awhile, not yet the eve is still,
The bees are wandering yet, and you may hear
The barley mowers on the trenched hill,
The sheep-bells, and the restless changing weir,
All little sounds made musical and clear
Beneath the sky that burning August gives,
While yet the thought of glorious Summer lives.

Ah, love! such happy days, such days as these,
Must we still waste them, craving for the best,
Like lovers o'er the painted images
Of those who once their yearning hearts have blessed?
Have we been happy on our day of rest?
Thine eyes say "yes,"—but if it came again,
Perchance its ending would not seem so vain.

NOW came fulfillment of the year's desire,
The tall wheat, coloured by the August fire
Grew heavy-headed, dreading its decay,
And blacker grew the elm-trees day by day.
About the edges of the yellow corn,
And o'er the gardens grown somewhat outworn
The bees went hurrying to fill up their store;
The apple-boughs bent over more and more;
With peach and apricot the garden wall,
Was odorous, and the pears began to fall
From off the high tree with each freshening breeze.
So in a house bordered about with trees,
A little raised above the waving gold
The Wanderers heard this marvellous story told,
While 'twixt the gleaming flasks of ancient wine,
They watched the reapers' slow advancing line.

PYGMALION AND THE IMAGE.

ARGUMENT.

A MAN of Cyprus, a Sculptor named Pygmalion, made an Image of a Woman, fairer than any that had yet been seen, and in the end came to love his own handiwork as though it had been alive: wherefore, praying to Venus for help, he obtained his end, for she made the Image alive indeed, and a Woman, and Pygmalion wedded her.

AT Amathus, that from the southern side
Of Cyprus, looks across the Syrian sea,
There did in ancient time a man abide
Known to the island-dwellers, for that he
Had wrought most godlike works in imagery,
And day by day still greater honour won,
Which man our old books call Pygmalion.

Yet in the praise of men small joy he had,
But walked abroad with downcast brooding face,
Nor yet by any damsel was made glad;
For, sooth to say, the women of that place
Must seem to all men an accursed race,
Who with the turner of all hearts once strove
So in their hearts must carry lust for love.

Now on a day it chanced that he had been
About the streets, and on the crowded quays,
Rich with unopened wealth of bales, had seen
The dark-eyed merchants of the southern seas
In chaffer with the base Propœtides,
And heavy-hearted gat him home again,
His once-loved life grown idle, poor, and vain.

And there upon his images he cast
His weary eyes, yet little noted them,
As still from name to name his swift thought passed.
For what to him was Juno's well-wrought hem,
Diana's shaft, or Pallas' olive-stem?
What help could Hermes' rod unto him give,
Until with shadowy things he came to live?

Yet note, that though, while looking on the sun,
The craftsman o'er his work some morn of spring
May chide his useless labour never done,
For all his murmurs, with no other thing
He soothes his heart, and dulls thoughts' poisonous sting,
And thus in thought's despite the world goes on;
And so it was with this Pygmalion.

Unto the chisel must he set his hand,
And slowly, still in troubled thought must pace,
About a work begun, that there doth stand,
And still returning to the self-same place,
Unto the image now must set his face,

And with a sigh his wonted toil begin,
Half-loathed, half-loved, a little rest to win.

The lessening marble that he worked upon,
A woman's form now imaged doubtfully,
And in such guise the work had he begun,
Because when he the untouched block did see
In wandering veins that form there seemed to be,
Whereon he cried out in a careless mood,
"O lady Venus, make this presage good!

"And then this block of stone shall be thy maid,
And, not without rich golden ornament,
Shall bide within thy quivering myrtle-shade."
So spoke he, but the goddess, well content,
Unto his hand such godlike mastery sent,
That like the first artificer he wrought,
Who made the gift that woe to all men brought.

And yet, but such as he was wont to do,
At first indeed that work divine he deemed,
And as the white chips from the chisel flew
Of other matters languidly he dreamed,
For easy to his hand that labour seemed,
And he was stirred with many a troubling thought,
And many a doubt perplexed him as he wrought.

And yet, again, at last there came a day
When smoother and more shapely grew the stone,

And he, grown eager, put all thought away
But that which touched his craftsmanship alone,
And he would gaze at what his hands had done,
Until his heart with boundless joy would swell
That all was wrought so wonderfully well.

Yet long it was ere he was satisfied,
And with his pride that by his mastery
This thing was done, whose equal far and wide
In no town of the world a man could see,
Came burning longing that the work should be
E'en better still, and to his heart there came
A strange and strong desire he could not name.

The night seemed long, and long the twilight seemed,
A vain thing seemed his flowery garden fair;
Though through the night still of his work he dreamed,
And though his smooth-stemmed trees so nigh it were,
That thence he could behold the marble hair;
Nought was enough, until with steel in hand
He came before the wondrous stone to stand.

No song could charm him, and no histories
Of men's misdoings could avail him now,
Nay, scarcely seaward had he turned his eyes,
If men had said, "the fierce Tyrrhenians row
Up through the bay, rise up and strike a blow
For life and goods;" for nought to him seemed dear
But to his well-loved work to be anear.

Then vexed he grew, and knowing not his heart,
Unto himself he said, "Ah, what is this,
That I who oft was happy to depart,
And wander where the boughs each other kiss
'Neath the west wind, now have no other bliss
But in vain smoothing of this marble maid,
Whose chips this month a drachma had outweighed.

"Lo I will get me to the woods and try.
If I my woodcraft have forgotten quite,
And then, returning, lay this folly by,
And eat my fill, and sleep my sleep a-night,
And 'gin to carve a Hercules aright
Upon the morrow, and perchance indeed
The Theban will be good to me at need."

With that he took his quiver and his bow,
And through the gates of Amathus he went,
And toward the mountain slopes began to go,
Within the woods to work out his intent.
Fair was the day, the honied beanfield's scent
The west wind bore unto him; o'er the way
The glittering noisy poplar leaves did play.

All things were moving; as his hurried feet
Passed by, within the flowery swathe he heard
The sweeping of the scythe, the swallow fleet
Rose over him, the sitting partridge stirred
On the field's edge; the brown bee by him whirred,

Or murmured in the clover flowers below.
But he with bowed-down head failed not to go.

At last he stopped, and, looking round, he said,
"Like one whose thirtieth year is well gone by,
The day is getting ready to be dead;
No rest, and on the border of the sky
Already the great banks of dark haze lie;
No rest—what do I midst this stir and noise?
What part have I in these unthinking joys?"

With that he turned, and toward the city-gate
Through the sweet fields went swifter than he came,
And cast his heart into the hands of fate;
Nor strove with it, when higher 'gan to flame
That strange and strong desire without a name;
Till panting, thinking of nought else, once more
His hand was on the latch of his own door.

One moment there he lingered, as he said,
"Alas! what should I do if she were gone."
But even with that word his brow waxed red
To hear his own lips name a thing of stone,
As though the gods some marvel there had done,
And made his work alive; and therewithal
In turn great pallor on his face did fall.

But with a sigh he passed into the house,
Yet even then his chamber-door must hold,

And listen there, half-blind and timorous,
Until his heart should wax a little bold;
Then entering, motionless and white and cold
He saw the image stand amidst the floor
That whitened was by labour done before.

Blinded with tears, his chisel up he caught,
And, drawing near, and sighing, tenderly
Upon the marvel of the face he wrought,
E'en as he used to pass the long days by;
But his sighs changed to sobbing presently,
And on the floor the useless steel he flung,
And, weeping loud, about the image clung.

"Alas!" he cried, "why have I made thee then,
That thus thou mockest me? I know indeed
That many such as thou are loved of men,
Whose passionate eyes poor wretches still will lead
Into their net, and smile to see them bleed;
But these the Gods made, and this hand made thee
Who wilt not speak one little word to me."

Then from the image did he draw aback
To gaze on it through tears: and you had said,
Regarding it, that little did it lack
To be a living and most lovely maid;
Naked it was, its unbound locks were laid
Over the lovely shoulders; with one hand
Reached out, as to a lover, did it stand,

The other held a fair rose over-blown;
No smile was on the parted lips, the eyes
Seemed as if even now great love had shown
Unto them, something of its sweet surprise,
Yet saddened them with half-seen mysteries,
And still midst passion maiden-like she seemed,
As though of love unchanged for aye she dreamed.

Reproachfully beholding all her grace,
Pygmalion stood, until he grew dry-eyed,
And then at last he turned away his face
As if from her cold eyes his grief to hide;
And thus a weary while did he abide,
With nothing in his heart but vain desire,
The ever-burning, unconsuming fire.

But when again he turned his visage round
His eyes were brighter and no more he wept,
As if some little solace he had found,
Although his folly none the more had slept,
Rather some new-born god-sent madness kept
His other madness from destroying him,
And made the hope of death wax faint and dim:

For, trembling and ashamed, from out the street
Strong men he called, and faint with jealousy
He caused them bear the ponderous, moveless feet
Unto the chamber where he used to lie,
So in a fair niche to his bed a-nigh,

Unwitting of his woe, they set it down,
Then went their ways beneath his troubled frown.

Then to his treasury he went, and sought
For gems for its adornment, but all there
Seemed to his eager eyes but poor and nought,
Not worthy e'en to touch her rippled hair,
So he, departing, through the streets 'gan fare,
And from the merchants at a mighty cost
Bought gems that kings for no good deed had lost.

These then he hung her senseless neck around,
Set on her fingers, and fair arms of stone,
Then cast himself before her on the ground,
Praying for grace for all that he had done
In leaving her untended and alone;
And still with every hour his madness grew
Though all his folly in his heart he knew.

At last asleep before her feet he lay,
Worn out with passion, yet this burning pain
Returned on him, when with the light of day
He woke and wept before her feet again;
Then of the fresh and new-born morning fain,
Into his garden passed, and therefrom bore
Fresh spoil of flowers his love to lay before.

A little altar, with fine gold o'erlaid,
Was in his house, that he a while ago

At some great man's command had deftly made,
And this he now must take and set below
Her well-wrought feet, and there must red flame glow
About sweet wood, and he must send her thence
The odour of Arabian frankincense.

Then as the smoke went up, he prayed and said,
"Thou, image, hear'st me not, nor wilt thou speak,
But I perchance shall know when I am dead,
If this has been some goddess' sport, to seek
A wretch, and in his heart infirm and weak
To set her glorious image, so that he,
Loving the form of immortality,

"May make much laughter for the gods above:
Hear me, and if my love misliketh thee
Then take my life away, for I will love
Till death unfeared at last shall come to me,
And give me rest, if he of might may be
To slay the love of that which cannot die,
The heavenly beauty that can ne'er pass by."

No word indeed the moveless image said,
But with the sweet grave eyes his hands had wrought
Still gazed down on his bowed imploring head,
Yet his own words some solace to him brought,
Gilding the net wherein his soul was caught
With something like to hope, and all that day
Some tender words he ever found to say;

And still he felt as something heard him speak;
Sometimes he praised her beauty, and sometimes
Reproached her in a feeble voice and weak,
And at the last drew forth a book of rhymes,
Wherein were writ the tales of many climes,
And read aloud the sweetness hid therein
Of lovers' sorrows and their tangled sin.

And when the sun went down, the frankincense
Again upon the altar-flame he cast
That through the open window floating thence
O'er the fresh odours of the garden passed;
And so another day was gone at last,
And he no more his love-lorn watch could keep,
But now for utter weariness must sleep.

But in the night he dreamed that she was gone,
And knowing that he dreamed, tried hard to wake
And could not, but forsaken and alone
He seemed to weep as though his heart would break,
And when the night her sleepy veil did take
From off the world, waking, his tears he found
Still wet upon the pillow all around.

Then at the first, bewildered by those tears,
He fell a-wondering wherefore he had wept,
But suddenly remembering all his fears,
Panting with terror, from the bed he leapt,
But still its wonted place the image kept,

Nor moved for all the joyful ecstasy
Wherewith he blessed the day that showed it nigh.

Then came the morning offering and the day,
Midst flowers and words of love and kisses sweet
From morn, through noon, to evening passed away,
And scarce unhappy, crouching at her feet,
He saw the sun descend the sea to meet;
And scarce unhappy through the darkness crept
Unto his bed, and midst soft dreaming slept.

BUT the next morn, e'en while the incense-smoke
At sun-rising curled round about her head,
Sweet sound of songs the wonted quiet broke
Down in the street, and he by something led,
He knew not what, must leave his prayer unsaid,
And through the freshness of the morn must see
The folk who went with that sweet minstrelsy;

Damsels and youths in wonderful attire,
And in their midst upon a car of gold
An image of the Mother of Desire,
Wrought by his hands in days that seemed grown old,
Though those sweet limbs a garment did enfold,
Coloured like flame, enwrought with precious things,
Most fit to be the prize of striving kings.

Then he remembered that the manner was
That fair-clad priests the lovely Queen should take
Thrice in the year, and through the city pass,
And with sweet songs the dreaming folk awake;
And through the clouds a light there seemed to break
When he remembered all the tales well told
About her glorious kindly deeds of old.

So his unfinished prayer he finished not,
But, kneeling, once more kissed the marble feet,
And, while his heart with many thoughts waxed hot,
He clad himself with fresh attire and meet
For that bright service, and with blossoms sweet
Entwined with tender leaves he crowned his head,
And followed after as the goddess led.

But long and vain unto him seemed the way
Until they came unto her house again;
Long years, the while they went about to lay
The honey-hiding dwellers on the plain,
The sweet companions of the yellowing grain
Upon her golden altar; long and long
Before, at end of their delicious song,

They stripped her of her weed with reverend hands,
And showed the ivory limbs his hand had wrought;
Yea, and too long e'en then ere those fair bands,
Dispersing here and there, the shadow sought
Of Indian spice-trees o'er the warm sea brought

And toward the splashing of the fountain turned,
Mocked the noon sun that o'er the cloisters burned.

But when the crowd of worshippers was gone,
And through the golden dimness of the place
The goddess' very servants paced alone,
Or some lone damsel murmured of her case
Apart from prying eyes, he turned his face
Unto that image made with toil and care,
In days when unto him it seemed most fair.

Dusky and dim, though rich with gems and gold,
The house of Venus was; high in the dome
The burning sun-light you might now behold,
From nowhere else the light of day might come,
To curse the Shame-faced Mother's lovely home;
A long way off the shrine, the fresh sea-breeze,
Now just arising, brushed the myrtle-trees.

The torches of the flower-crowned, singing band
Erewhile, indeed, made more than daylight there,
Lighting the painted tales of many a land,
And carven heroes, with their unused glare;
But now a few soft, glimmering lamps there were,
And on the altar a thin, flickering flame
Just showed the golden letters of her name.

Blue in the dome yet hung the incense-cloud,
And still its perfume lingered all around;

And, trodden by the light-foot, fervent crowd,
Thick lay the summer flowers upon the ground,
And now from far-off halls uprose the sound
Of Lydian music, and the dancer's cry,
As though some door were opened suddenly.

So there he stood, that help from her to gain,
Bewildered by that twilight midst of day;
Downcast with listening to the joyous strain
He had no part in, hopeless with delay
Of all the fair things he had meant to say;
Yet, as the incense on the flame he cast, [passed,—
From stammering lips and pale these words there

" O thou forgotten help, dost thou yet know
What thing it is I need, when even I,
Bent down before thee in this shame and woe,
Can frame no set of words to tell thee why
I needs must pray, O help me or I die!
Or slay me, and in slaying take from me
Even a dead man's feeble memory.

" Say not thine help I have been slow to seek;
Here have I been from the first hour of morn,
Who stand before thy presence faint and weak,
Of my one poor delight left all forlorn;
Trembling with many fears, the hope outworn
I had when first I left my love, my shame,
To call upon thine oft-sung glorious name."

He stopped to catch his breath, for as a sob
Did each word leave his mouth; but suddenly,
Like a live thing, the thin flame 'gan to throb
And gather force, and then shot up on high
A steady spike of light, that drew anigh
The sunbeam in the dome, then sank once more
Into a feeble flicker as before.

But at that sight the nameless hope he had
That kept him living midst unhappiness,
Stirred in his breast, and with changed face and glad
Unto the image forward must he press
With words of praise his first word to redress,
But then it was as though a thick black cloud
Altar, and fire, and ivory limbs did shroud.

He staggered back, amazed and full of awe;
But when, with anxious eyes, he gazed around,
About him still the worshippers he saw
Sunk in their wonted works, with no surprise
At what to him seemed awful mysteries;
Therewith he sighed and said, "This, too, I dream,
No better day upon my life shall beam."

And yet for long upon the place he gazed
Where other folk beheld the lovely queen;
And while he looked the dusky veil seemed raised,
And every thing was as it erst had been;
And then he said, "Such marvels I have seen

As some sick man may see from off his bed:
Ah, I am sick, and would that I were dead!"

Therewith, not questioning his heart at all,
He turned away and left the holy place,
When now the wide sun reddened towards his fall,
And a fresh west wind held the clouds in chase;
But coming out, at first he hid his face
Dazed with the light, and in the porch he stood,
Nor wished to move, or change his dreary mood.

Yet in a while the freshness of the eve
Pierced to his weary heart, and with a sigh
He raised his head, and slowly 'gan to leave
The high carved pillars; and so presently
Had passed the grove of whispering myrtles by,
And, mid the many noises of the street,
Made himself brave the eyes of men to meet.

Thronged were the ways with folk in gay attire,
Nursing the end of that festivity;
Girls fit to move the moody man's desire
Brushed past him, and soft dainty minstrelsy
He heard amid the laughter, and might see,
Through open doors, the garden's green delight,
Where pensive lovers waited for the night;

Or resting dancers round the fountain drawn,
With faces flushed unto the breeze turned round,

Or wandering o'er the fragrant trodden lawn,
Took up their fallen garlands from the ground,
Or languidly their scattered tresses bound,
Or let their gathered raiment fall adown,
With eyes downcast beneath their lovers' frown.

What hope Pygmalion yet might have, when he
First left the pillars of the dreamy place,
Amid such sights had vanished utterly.
He turned his weary eyes from face to face,
Nor noted them, as at a lagging pace
He 'gat towards home, and still was murmuring,
"Ah life, sweet life! the only godlike thing!"

And as he went, though longing to be there
Whereas his sole desire awaited him,
Yet did he loath to see the image fair,
White and unchanged of face, unmoved of limb,
And to his heart came dreamy thoughts and dim
That unto some strange region he might come,
Nor ever reach again his loveless home.

Yet soon, indeed, before his door he stood,
And, as a man awaking from a dream,
Seemed waked from his old folly; nought seemed good
In all the things that he before had deemed
At least worth life, and on his heart there streamed
Cold light of day—he found himself alone,
Reft of desire, all love and madness gone.

And yet for that past folly must he weep,
As one might mourn the parted happiness
That, mixed with madness, made him smile in sleep;
And still some lingering sweetness seemed to bless
The hard life left of toil and loneliness,
Like a past song too sweet, too short, and yet
Emmeshed for ever in the memory's net.

Weeping he entered, murmuring, "O fair Queen,
I thank thee that my prayer was not for nought,
Truly a present helper hast thou been
To those who faithfully thy throne have sought!
Yet, since with pain deliverance I have bought,
Hast thou not yet some gift in store for me,
That I thine happy slave henceforth may be?"

THUS to his chamber at the last he came,
And, pushing through the still half-opened door,
He stood within; but there, for very shame
Of all the things that he had done before,
Still kept his eyes bent down upon the floor,
Thinking of all that he had done and said
Since he had wrought that luckless marble maid.

Yet soft his thoughts were, and the very place
Seemed perfumed with some nameless heavenly air

So gaining courage, did he raise his face
Unto the work his hands had made so fair,
And cried aloud to see the niche all bare
Of that sweet form, while through his heart again
There shot a pang of his old yearning pain.

Yet while he stood, and knew not what to do
With yearning, a strange thrill of hope there came,
A shaft of new desire now pierced him through,
And therewithal a soft voice called his name,
And when he turned, with eager eyes aflame,
He saw betwixt him and the setting sun
The lively image of his loved one.

He trembled at the sight, for though her eyes,
Her very lips, were such as he had made,
And though her tresses fell but in such guise
As he had wrought them, now was she arrayed
In that fair garment that the priests had laid
Upon the goddess on that very morn,
Dyed like the setting sun upon the corn.

Speechless he stood, but she now drew anear,
Simple and sweet as she was wont to be,
And once again her silver voice rang clear,
Filling his soul with great felicity,
And thus she spoke, "Wilt thou not come to me,
O dear companion of my new-found life,
For I am called thy lover and thy wife?

"Listen, these words the Dread One bade me say
That was with me e'ennow, *Pygmalion,*
My new-made soul I give to thee to-day,
Come, feel the sweet breath that thy prayer has won,
And lay thine hand this heaving breast upon!
Come love, and walk with me between the trees,
And feel the freshness of the evening breeze

"*Sweep mine hair round thy neck; behold my feet,*
The oft-kissed feet thou thoughtst should never move,
Press down the daisies! draw me to thee, sweet,
And feel the warm heart of thy living love
Beat against thine, and bless the Seed of Jove
Whose loving tender heart hath wrought all this,
And wrapped us both in such a cloud of bliss.

"Ah, thou art wise to know what this may mean!
Sweet seem the words to me, and needs must I
Speak all the lesson of the lovely queen:
But this I know, I would we were more nigh,
I have not heard thy voice but in the cry
Thou utteredst then, when thou believedst gone
The marvel of thine hands, the maid of stone."

She reached her hand to him, and with kind eyes
Gazed into his; but he the fingers caught
And drew her to him, and midst ecstasies
Passing all words, yea, well-nigh passing thought,
Felt that sweet breath that he so long had sought,

Felt the warm life within her heaving breast
As in his arms his living love he pressed.

But as his cheek touched hers he heard her say,
"Wilt thou not speak, O love? why dost thou weep?
Art thou then sorry for this long-wished day,
Or dost thou think perchance thou wilt not keep
This that thou holdest, but in dreamy sleep?
Nay, let us do the bidding of the Queen,
And hand in hand walk through thy garden green;

"Then shalt thou tell me, still beholding me,
Full many things whereof I wish to know,
And as we walk from whispering tree to tree
Still more familiar to thee shall I grow,
And such things shalt thou say unto me now
As when thou deemedst thou wast quite alone,
A madman, kneeling to a thing of stone."

But at that word a smile lit up his eyes
And therewithal he spake some loving word,
And she at first looked up in grave surprise
When his deep voice and musical she heard,
And clung to him as somewhat grown afeard;
Then cried aloud and said, "O mighty one!
What joy with thee to look upon the sun."

Then into that fair garden did they pass
And all the story of his love he told,

And as the twain went o'er the dewy grass,
Beneath the risen moon could he behold
The bright tears trickling down, then, waxen bold,
He stopped and said, "Ah, love, what meaneth this?
Seest thou how tears still follow earthly bliss?"

Then both her white arms round his neck she threw,
And sobbing said, "O love, what hurteth me?
When first the sweetness of my life I knew,
Not this I felt, but when I first saw thee
A little pain and great felicity
Rose up within me, and thy talk e'en now
Made pain and pleasure ever greater grow?"

"O sweet," he said, "this thing is even love,
Whereof I told thee; that all wise men fear,
But yet escape not; nay, to gods above,
Unless the old tales lie, it draweth near.
But let my happy ears I pray thee hear
Thy story too, and how thy blessed birth
Has made a heaven of this once lonely earth."

"My sweet," she said, "as yet I am not wise,
Or stored with words, aright the tale to tell,
But listen: when I opened first mine eyes
I stood within the niche thou knowest well,
And from mine hand a heavy thing there fell
Carved like these flowers, nor could I see things clear,
And but a strange confused noise could hear.

"At last mine eyes could see a woman fair,
But awful as this round white moon o'erhead,
So that I trembled when I saw her there,
For with my life was born some touch of dread,
And therewithal I heard her voice that said,
'Come down, and learn to love and be alive,
For thee, a well-prized gift, to-day I give.'

"Then on the floor I stepped, rejoicing much,
Not knowing why, not knowing aught at all,
Till she reached out her hand my breast to touch,
And when her fingers thereupon did fall,
Thought came unto my life, and therewithal
I knew her for a goddess, and began
To murmur in some tongue unknown to man.

"And then indeed not in this guise was I,
No sandals had I, and no saffron gown,
But naked as thou knowest utterly,
E'en as my limbs beneath thine hand had grown,
And this fair perfumed robe then fell adown
Over the goddess' feet and swept the ground,
And round her loins a glittering belt was bound.

"But when the stammering of my tongue she heard
Upon my trembling lips her hand she laid,
And spoke again, 'Nay, say not any word,
All that thine heart would say I know unsaid,
Who even now thine heart and voice have made;

But listen rather, for thou knowest now
What these words mean, and still wilt wiser grow.

"'Thy body, lifeless till I gave it life,
A certain man, my servant, well hath wrought,
I give thee to him as his love and wife,
With all thy dowry of desire and thought,
Since this his yearning heart hath ever sought;
Now from my temple is he on the way,
Deeming to find thee e'en as yesterday;

"'Bide thou his coming by the bed-head there,
And when thou seest him set his eyes upon
Thine empty niche, and hear'st him cry for care,
Then call him by his name, Pygmalion,
And certainly thy lover hast thou won;
But when he stands before thee silently,
Say all these words that I shall teach to thee.'

"With that she said what first I told thee, love,
And then went on, 'Moreover thou shalt say
That I, the daughter of almighty Jove,
Have wrought for him this long-desired day;
In sign whereof, these things that pass away,
Wherein mine image men have well arrayed,
I give thee for thy wedding gear, O maid.'

"Therewith her raiment she put off from her,
And laid bare all her perfect loveliness,

And, smiling on me, came yet more anear,
And on my mortal lips her lips did press,
And said, 'Now herewith shalt thou love no less
Than Psyche loved my son in days of old;
Farewell, of thee shall many a tale be told.'

"And even with that last word was she gone,
How, I know not, and I my limbs arrayed
In her fair gifts, and waited thee alone—
Ah, love, indeed the word is true she said,
For now I love thee so, I grow afraid
Of what the gods upon our heads may send—
I love thee so, I think upon the end."

What words he said? How can I tell again
What words they said beneath the glimmering light,
Some tongue they used unknown to loveless men
As each to each they told their great delight,
Until for stillness of the growing night
Their soft sweet murmuring words seemed growing loud,
And dim the moon grew, hid by fleecy cloud.

SUCH was the ending of his ancient rhyme,
That seemed to fit that soft and golden time,
When men were happy, they could scarce tell why,
Although they felt the rich year slipping by.
The sun went down, the harvest-moon arose,
And 'twixt the slim trees of that fruitful close
They saw the corn still falling 'neath its light,
While through the soft air of the windless night
The voices of the reapers' mates rang clear
In measured song, as of the fruitful year
They told, and its delights, and now and then
The rougher voices of the toiling men
Joined in the song, as one by one released
From that hard toil, they sauntered towards the feast
That waited them upon the strip of grass
That through the golden glimmering sea did pass.
But those old men, glad to have lived so long,
Sat listening through the twilight to the song,
And when the night grew and all things were still
Throughout the wide vale from green hill to hill
Unto a happy harvesting they drank
Till once more o'er the hills the white moon sank.

AUGUST had not gone by, though now was stored
In the sweet-smelling granaries all the hoard
Of golden corn; the land had made her gain,
And winter should howl round her doors in vain.
But o'er the same fields grey now and forlorn
The old men sat and heard the swineherd's horn,
Far off across the stubble, when the day
At end of harvest-tide was sad and grey;
And rain was in the wind's voice as it swept
Along the hedges where the lone quail crept,
Beneath the chattering of the restless pie.
The fruit-hung branches moved, and suddenly
The trembling apples smote the dewless grass,
And all the year to autumn-tide did pass.
E'en such a day it was as young men love
When swiftly through the veins the blood doth move,
And they, whose eyes can see not death at all,
To thoughts of stirring deeds and pleasure fall,
Because it seems to them to tell of life
After the dreamy days devoid of strife,
When every day with sunshine is begun,
And cloudless skies receive the setting sun.

On such a day the older folk were fain
Of something new somewhat to dull the pain
Of sad, importunate old memories
That to their weary hearts must needs arise.

Alas! what new things on that day could come
From hearts that now so long had been the home
Of such dull thoughts, nay, rather let them tell
Some tale that fits their ancient longings well.

Rolf was the speaker, who said, "Friends, behold
This is e'en such a tale as those once told
Unto my greedy ears by Nicholas,
Before our quest for nothing came to pass."

OGIER THE DANE.

ARGUMENT.

WHEN Ogier was born, six fay ladies came to the cradle where he lay, and gave him various gifts, as to be brave and happy and the like ; but the sixth gave him to be her love when he should have lived long in the world : so Ogier grew up and became the greatest of knights, and at last, after many years, fell into the hands of that fay, and with her, as the story tells, he lives now, though he returned once to the world, as is shown in the process of this tale.

WITHIN some Danish city by the sea,
Whose name, changed now, is all unknown to me,
Great mourning was there one fair summer eve,
Because the angels, bidden to receive
The fair Queen's lovely soul in Paradise,
Had done their bidding, and in royal guise
Her helpless body, once the prize of love,
Unable now for fear or hope to move,
Lay underneath the golden canopy ;
And bowed down by unkingly misery
The King sat by it, and not far away,

Within the chamber a fair man-child lay,
His mother's bane, the king that was to be,
Not witting yet of any royalty,
Harmless and loved, although so new to life.

Calm the June evening was, no sign of strife
The clear sky showed, no storm grew round the sun,
Unhappy that his day of bliss was done;
Dumb was the sea, and if the beech-wood stirred,
'Twas with the nestling of the grey-winged bird
Midst its thick leaves; and though the nightingale
Her ancient, hapless sorrow must bewail,
No more of woe there seemed in her song
Than such as doth to lovers' words belong,
Because their love is still unsatisfied.

But to the King, on that sweet eventide,
No earth there seemed, no heaven when earth was gone;
No help, no God! but lonely pain alone;
And he, midst unreal shadows, seemed to sit
Himself the very heart and soul of it.
But round the cradle of the new-born child
The nurses now the weary time beguiled
With stories of the just departed Queen;
And how, amid the heathen folk first seen,
She had been won to love and godliness;
And as they spoke, e'en midst his dull distress,
An eager whisper now and then would smite
Upon the King's ear, of some past delight,
Some once familiar name, and he would raise

His weary head, and on the speaker gaze
Like one about to speak, but soon again
Would drop his head and be alone with pain,
Nor think of these; who, silent in their turn,
Would sit and watch the waxen tapers burn
Amidst the dusk of the quick-gathering night,
Until beneath the high stars' glimmering light,
The fresh earth lay in colourless repose.
So past the night, and now and then one rose
From out her place to do what might avail
To still the new-born infant's fretful wail;
Or through the softly-opened door there came
Some nurse new waked, who, whispering low the name
Of her whose turn was come, would take her place;
Then toward the King would turn about her face
And to her fellows whisper of the day,
And tell again of her just past away.

So passed the night, the moon arose and grew,
From off the sea a little west-wind blew,
Rustling the garden-leaves like sudden rain;
And ere the moon had 'gun to fall again
The wind grew cold, a change was in the sky,
And in deep silence did the dawn draw nigh:
Then from her place a nurse arose to light
Fresh hallowed lights, for, dying with the night,
The tapers round about the dead Queen were;
But the King raised his head and 'gan to stare
Upon her, as her sweeping gown did glide

About the floor, that in the stillness cried
Beneath her careful feet; and now as she
Had lit the second candle carefully,
And on its silver spike another one
Was setting, through her body did there run
A sudden tremor, and the hand was stayed
That on the dainty painted wax was laid;
Her eyelids fell down and she seemed to sleep,
And o'er the staring King began to creep
Sweet slumber too; the bitter lines of woe
That drew his weary face did softer grow,
His eyelids dropped, his arms fell to his side;
And moveless in their places did abide
The nursing women, held by some strong spell,
E'en as they were, and utter silence fell
Upon the mournful, glimmering chamber fair.

But now light footsteps coming up the stair,
Smote on the deadly stillness, and the sound
Of silken dresses trailing o'er the ground;
And heavenly odours through the chamber passed,
Unlike the scents that rose and lily cast
Upon the freshness of the dying night;
Then nigher drew the sound of footsteps light
Until the door swung open noiselessly—
A mass of sunlit flowers there seemed to be
Within the doorway, and but pale and wan
The flame showed now that serveth mortal man,
As one by one six seeming ladies passed
Into the room, and o'er its sorrow cast

That thoughtless sense of joy bewildering,
That kisses youthful hearts amidst of spring;
Crowned were they, in such glorious raiment clad,
As yet no merchant of the world has had
Within his coffers; yet those crowns seemed fair
Only because they kissed their odorous hair,
And all that flowery raiment was but blessed
By those fair bodies that its splendour pressed.

Now to the cradle from that glorious band,
A woman passed, and laid a tender hand
Upon the babe, and gently drew aside
The swathings soft that did his body hide;
And, seeing him so fair and great, she smiled,
And stooped, and kissed him, saying, "O noble child,
Have thou a gift from Gloriande this day;
For to the time when life shall pass away
From this dear heart, no fear of death or shame,
No weariness of good shall foul thy name."

So saying, to her sisters she returned;
And one came forth, upon whose brow there burned
A crown of rubies, and whose heaving breast
With happy rings a golden hauberk pressed;
She took the babe, and somewhat frowning said,
"This gift I give, that till thy limbs are laid
At rest for ever, to thine honoured life
There never shall be lacking war and strife,
That thou a long-enduring name mayst win,
And by thy deeds, good pardon for thy sin."

With that another, who, unseen, meanwhile

Had drawn anigh, said with a joyous smile,
"And this forgotten gift to thee I give,
That while amidst the turmoil thou dost live,
Still shalt thou win the game, and unto thee
Defeat and shame but idle words shall be."

Then back they turned, and therewithal, the fourth
Said, "Take this gift for what it may be worth,
For that is mine to give; lo, thou shalt be
Gentle of speech, and in all courtesy
The first of men: a little gift this is,
After these promises of fame and bliss."

Then toward the babe the fifth fair woman went;
Grey-eyed she was, and simple, with eyes bent
Down on the floor, parted her red lips were,
And o'er her sweet face marvellously fair
Oft would the colour spread full suddenly;
Clad in a dainty gown and thin was she,
For some green summer of the fay-land dight,
Tripping she went, and laid her fingers light
Upon the child, and said, "O little one,
As long as thou shalt look upon the sun
Shall women long for thee; take heed to this
And give them what thou canst of love and bliss."

Then, blushing for her words, therefrom she past,
And by the cradle stood the sixth and last,
The fairest of them all; awhile she gazed
Down on the child, and then her hand she raised,
And made the one side of her bosom bare;
"Ogier," she said, "if this be foul or fair

Thou know'st not now, but when thine earthly life
Is drunk out to the dregs, and war and strife
Have yielded thee whatever joy they may,
Thine head upon this bosom shalt thou lay;
And then, despite of knowledge or of God,
Will we be glad upon the flowery sod
Within the happy country where I dwell:
Ogier, my love that is to be, farewell!"

She turned, and even as they came they passed
From out the place, and reached the gate at last
That oped before their feet, and speedily
They gained the edges of the murmuring sea,
And as they stood in silence, gazing there
Out to the west, they vanished into air,
I know not how, nor whereto they returned.

But mixed with twilight in the chamber burned
The flickering candles, and those dreary folk,
Unlike to sleepers, from their trance awoke,
But nought of what had happed meanwhile they knew;
Through the half-opened casements now there blew
A sweet fresh air, that of the flowers and sea
Mingled together, smelt deliciously,
And from the unseen sun the spreading light
Began to make the fair June blossoms bright,
And midst their weary woe uprose the sun,
And thus has Ogier's noble life begun.

HOPE is our life, when first our life grows clear;
Hope and delight, scarce crossed by lines of fear,
Yet the day comes when fain we would not hope,
But forasmuch as we with life must cope,
Struggling with this and that, and who knows why?
Hope will not give us up to certainty,
But still must bide with us: and with this man,
Whose life amid such promises began
Great things she wrought; but now the time has come
When he no more on earth may have his home.
Great things he suffered, great delights he had,
Unto great kings he gave good deeds for bad;
He ruled o'er kingdoms where his name no more
Is had in memory, and on many a shore
He left his sweat and blood to win a name
Passing the bounds of earthly creatures' fame.
A love he won and lost, a well-loved son
Whose little day of promise soon was done:
A tender wife he had, that he must leave
Before his heart her love could well receive;
Those promised gifts, that on his careless head
In those first hours of his fair life were shed
He took unwitting, and unwitting spent,
Nor gave himself to grief and discontent
Because he saw the end a-drawing nigh.

Where is he now? in what land must he die,
To leave an empty name to us on earth?
A tale half true, to cast across our mirth
Some pensive thoughts of life that might have been;
Where is he now, that all this life has seen?

Behold, another eve I bid you see
Than that calm eve of his nativity;
The sun is setting in the west, the sky
Is clear and hard, and no clouds come anigh
The golden orb, but further off they lie,
Steel-grey and black with edges red as blood,
And underneath them is the weltering flood
Of some huge sea, whose tumbling hills, as they
Turn restless sides about, are black or grey,
Or green, or glittering with the golden flame;
The wind has fallen now, but still the same
The mighty army moves, as if to drown
This lone, bare rock, whose shear scarped sides of brown
Cast off the weight of waves in clouds of spray.
Alas! what ships upon an evil day
Bent over to the wind in this ill sea?
What navy, whose rent bones lie wretchedly
Beneath these cliffs? a mighty one it was,
A fearful storm to bring such things to pass.

This is the loadstone rock; no armament
Of warring nations, in their madness bent
Their course this way; no merchant wittingly

Has steered his keel unto this luckless sea;
Upon no shipman's card its name is writ,
Though worn-out mariners will speak of it
Within the ingle on the winter's night,
When all within is warm and safe and bright,
And the wind howls without: but 'gainst their will
Are some folk driven here, and then all skill
Against this evil rock is vain and nought,
And unto death the shipmen soon are brought;
For then the keel, as by a giant's hand,
Is drawn unto that mockery of a land,
And presently unto its sides doth cleave;
When if they 'scape swift death, yet none may leave
The narrow limits of that barren isle,
And thus are slain by famine in a while
Mocked, as they say, by night with images
Of noble castles among groves of trees,
By day with sounds of merry minstrelsy.

The sun sinks now below this hopeless sea,
The clouds are gone, and all the sky is bright;
The moon is rising o'er the growing night,
And by its light may ye behold the bones
Of generations of these luckless ones
Scattered about the rock; but nigh the sea
Sits one alive, who uncomplainingly
Awaits his death. White-haired is he and old,
Arrayed in royal raiment, bright with gold,
But tarnished with the waves and rough salt air;

Huge is he, of a noble face and fair,
As for an ancient man, though toil and eld
Furrow the cheeks that ladies once beheld
With melting hearts—Nay, listen, for he speaks!

"God, thou hast made me strong! nigh seven weeks
Have passed since from the wreck we haled our store,
And five long days well told, have now passed o'er
Since my last fellow died, with my last bread
Between his teeth, and yet I am not dead.
Yea, but for this I had been strong enow
In some last bloody field my sword to show.
What matter? soon will all be past and done,
Where'er I died I must have died alone:
Yet, Caraheu, a good death had it been
Dying, thy face above me to have seen,
And heard my banner flapping in the wind,
Then, though my memory had not left thy mind,
Yet hope and fear would not have vexed thee more
When thou hadst known that everything was o'er;
But now thou waitest, still expecting me,
Whose sail shall never speck thy bright blue sea.

"And thou, Clarice, the merchants thou mayst call,
To tell thee tales within thy pictured hall,
But never shall they tell true tales of me:
Whatever sails the Kentish hills may see
Swept by the flood-tide toward thy well-walled town,
No more on my sails shall they look adown.

"Get thee another leader, Charlemaine,
For thou shalt look to see my shield in vain,

When in the fair fields of the Frankish land,
Thick as the corn they tread, the heathen stand.
"What matter? ye shall learn to live your lives;
Husbands and children, other friends and wives,
Shall wipe the tablets of your memory clean,
And all shall be as I had never been.

"And now, O God, am I alone with Thee;
A little thing indeed it seems to be
To give this life up, since it needs must go
Some time or other; now at last I know
How foolishly men play upon the earth,
When unto them a year of life seems worth
Honour and friends, and these vague hopes and sweet
That like real things my dying heart do greet,
Unreal while living on the earth I trod,
And but myself I knew no other god.
Behold, I thank Thee that Thou sweet'nest thus,
This end, that I had thought most piteous,
If of another I had heard it told."

What man is this, who weak and worn and old,
Gives up his life within that dreadful isle,
And on the fearful coming death can smile?
Alas! this man so battered and outworn,
Is none but he, who, on that summer morn,
Received such promises of glorious life:
Ogier the Dane this is, to whom all strife
Was but as wine to stir awhile the blood,

To whom all life, however hard, was good:
This is the man, unmatched of heart and limb,
Ogier the Dane, whose sight has waxed not dim
For all the years that he on earth has dwelt;
Ogier the Dane, that never fear has felt,
Since he knew good from ill; Ogier the Dane,
The heathen's dread, the evil-doer's bane.

BRIGHT had the moon grown as his words were done,
And no more was there memory of the sun
Within the west, and he grew drowsy now,
And somewhat smoother was his wrinkled brow
As thought died out beneath the hand of sleep,
And o'er his soul forgetfulness did creep,
Hiding the image of swift-coming death;
Until as peacefully he drew his breath
As on that day, past for a hundred years,
When, midst the nurse's quickly-falling tears,
He fell asleep to his first lullaby.

The night changed as he slept, white clouds and high
Began about the lonely moon to close;
And from the dark west a new wind arose,
And with the sound of heavy-falling waves
Mingled its pipe about the loadstone caves;

But when the twinkling stars were hid away,
And a faint light and broad, like dawn of day,
The moon upon that dreary country shed,
Ogier awoke, and lifting up his head
And smiling, muttered, "Nay, no more again;
Rather some pleasure new, some other pain,
Unthought of both, some other form of strife;"
For he had waked from dreams of his old life,
And through St. Omer's archer-guarded gate
Once more had seemed to pass, and saw the state
Of that triumphant king; and still, though all
Seemed changed, and folk by other names did call
Faces he knew of old, yet none the less
He seemed the same, and, midst that mightiness,
Felt his own power, and grew the more athirst
For coming glory, as of old, when first
He stood before the face of Charlemaine,
A helpless hostage with all life to gain.
But now, awake, his worn face once more sank
Between his hands, and, murmuring not, he drank
The draught of death that must that thirst allay.

But while he sat and waited for the day
A sudden light across the bare rock streamed,
Which at the first he noted not, but deemed
The moon her fleecy veil had broken through;
But ruddier indeed this new light grew
Than were the moon's grey beams, and, therewithal,
Soft far-off music on his ears did fall;

Yet moved he not, but murmured, "This is death,
An easy thing like this to yield my breath,
Awake, yet dreaming, with no sounds of fear,
No dreadful sights to tell me it is near;
Yea, God, I thank thee!" but with that last word
It seemed to him that he his own name heard
Whispered, as though the wind had borne it past;
With that he gat unto his feet at last,
But still awhile he stood, with sunken head,
And in a low and trembling voice he said,
"Lord, I am ready, whither shall I go?
I pray thee unto me some token show."
And, as he said this, round about he turned,
And in the east beheld a light that burned
As bright as day; then, though his flesh might fear
The coming change that he believed so near,
Yet did his soul rejoice, for now he thought
Unto the very heaven to be brought:
And though he felt alive, deemed it might be
That he in sleep had died full easily.

Then toward that light did he begin to go,
And still those strains he heard, far off and low,
That grew no louder; still that bright light streamed
Over the rocks, yet nothing brighter seemed,
But like the light of some unseen bright flame
Shone round about, until at last he came
Unto the dreary islet's other shore,
And then the minstrelsy he heard no more,
And softer seemed the strange light unto him;

But yet or ever it had grown quite dim,
Beneath its waning light could he behold
A mighty palace set about with gold,
Above green meads and groves of summer trees
Far-off across the welter of the seas;
But, as he gazed, it faded from his sight,
And the grey hidden moon's diffused soft light,
Which soothly was but darkness to him now,
His sea-girt island prison did but show.

But o'er the sea he still gazed wistfully,
And said, "Alas! and when will this go by
And leave my soul in peace? must I still dream
Of life that once so dear a thing did seem,
That, when I wake, death may the bitterer be?
Here will I sit until he come to me,
And hide mine eyes and think upon my sin,
That so a little calm I yet may win
Before I stand within the awful place."

Then down he sat and covered up his face,
Yet therewithal his trouble could not hide,
Nor waiting thus for death could he abide,
For, though he knew it not, the yearning pain
Of hope of life had touched his soul again—
If he could live awhile, if he could live!
The mighty being, who once was wont to give
The gift of life to many a trembling man;
Who did his own will since his life began;
Who feared not aught, but strong and great and free
Still cast aside the thought of what might be;

Must all this then be lost, and with no will,
Powerless and blind, must he some fate fulfil,
Nor know what he is doing any more?

Soon he arose and paced along the shore,
And gazed out seaward for the blessed light;
But nought he saw except the old sad sight;
The ceaseless tumbling of the billows grey,
The white upspringing of the spurts of spray
Amidst that mass of timbers, the rent bones
Of the sea-houses of the hapless ones
Once cast like him upon this deadly isle.
He stopped his pacing in a little while,
And clenched his mighty hands, and set his teeth,
And gazing at the ruin underneath,
He swung from off the bare cliff's jagged brow,
And on some slippery ledge he wavered now,
Without a hand-hold, and now stoutly clung
With hands alone, and o'er the welter hung,
Not caring aught if thus his life should end;
But safely midst all this did he descend
The dreadful cliff, and since no beach was there,
But from the depths the rock-rose stark and bare,
Nor crumbled aught beneath the hammering sea,
Upon the wrecks he stood unsteadily.

But now, amid the clamour of the waves,
And washing to-and-fro of beams and staves,
Dizzy with hunger, dreamy with distress,

And all those days of fear and loneliness,
The ocean's tumult seemed the battle's roar,
His heart grew hot, as when in days of yore
He heard the cymbals clash amid the crowd
Of dusky faces; now he shouted loud,
And from crushed beam to beam began to leap,
And yet his footing somehow did he keep
Amidst their tossing, and indeed the sea
Was somewhat sunk upon the island's lee.
So quickly on from wreck to wreck he passed,
And reached the outer line of wrecks at last,
And there a moment stood unsteadily,
Amid the drift of spray that hurried by,
And drew Courtain his sword from out its sheath,
And poised himself to meet the coming death,
Still looking out to sea; but as he gazed,
And once or twice his doubtful feet he raised
To take the final plunge, that heavenly strain
Over the washing waves he heard again,
And from the dimness something bright he saw
Across the waste of waters towards him draw;
And hidden now, now raised aloft, at last
Unto his very feet a boat was cast,
Gilded inside and out, and well arrayed
With cushions soft; far fitter to have weighed
From some sweet garden on the shallow Seine,
Or in a reach of green Thames to have lain,
Than struggle with that huge confusèd sea;
But Ogier gazed upon it doubtfully

One moment, and then, sheathing Courtain, said,
"What tales are these about the newly dead
The heathen told? what matter, let all pass;
This moment as one dead indeed I was,
And this must be what I have got to do,
I yet perchance may light on something new
Before I die; though yet perchance this keel
Unto the wondrous mass of charmed steel
Is drawn as others." With that word he leapt
Into the boat, and o'er the cushions crept
From stem to stern, but found no rudder there,
Nor any oars, nor were the cushions fair
Made wet by any dashing of the sea.
Now while he pondered how these things could be,
The boat began to move therefrom at last,
But over him a drowsiness was cast,
And as o'er tumbling hills the skiff did pass,
He clean forgot his death and where he was.

At last he woke up to a sunny day,
And, looking round, saw that his shallop lay
Moored at the edge of some fair tideless sea
Unto an overhanging thick-leaved tree,
Where in the green waves did the low bank dip
Its fresh and green grass-covered daisied lip;
But Ogier looking thence no more could see
That sad abode of death and misery,
Nor aught but wide and empty ocean, grey
With gathering haze, for now it neared midday;

Then from the golden cushions did he rise,
And wondering still if this were Paradise
He stepped ashore, but drew Courtain his sword
And muttered therewithal a holy word.

Fair was the place, as though amidst of May,
Nor did the brown birds fear the sunny day,
For with their quivering song the air was sweet;
Thick grew the field-flowers underneath his feet,
And on his head the blossoms down did rain,
Yet mid these fair things slowly and with pain
He 'gan to go, yea, even when his foot
First touched the flowery sod, to his heart's root
A coldness seemed to strike, and now each limb
Was growing stiff, his eyes waxed bleared and dim,
And all his stored-up memory 'gan to fail,
Nor yet would his once mighty heart avail
For lamentations o'er his changed lot;
Yet urged by some desire, he knew not what,
Along a little path 'twixt hedges sweet,
Drawn sword in hand, he dragged his faltering feet,
For what then seemed to him a weary way,
Whereon his steps he needs must often stay
And lean upon the mighty well-worn sword
That in those hands, grown old, for king or lord
Had small respect in glorious days long past.

But still he crept along, and at the last
Came to a gilded wicket, and through this
Entered a garden fit for utmost bliss,

If that might last which needs must soon go by:
There 'gainst a tree he leaned, and with a sigh
He said, "O God, a sinner I have been,
And good it is that I these things have seen
Before I meet what thou hast set apart
To cleanse the earthly folly from my heart;
But who within this garden now can dwell
Wherein guilt first upon the world befell?"

A little further yet he staggered on,
Till to a fountain-side at last he won,
O'er which two white-thorns their sweet blossoms shed,
There he sank down, and laid his weary head
Beside the mossy roots, and in a while
He slept, and dreamed himself within the isle;
That splashing fount the weary sea did seem,
And in his dream the fair place but a dream;
But when again to feebleness he woke
Upon his ears that heavenly music broke,
Not faint or far as in the isle it was,
But e'en as though the minstrels now did pass
Anigh his resting-place; then fallen in doubt,
E'en as he might, he rose and gazed about,
Leaning against the hawthorn stem with pain;
And yet his straining gaze was but in vain,
Death stole so fast upon him, and no more
Could he behold the blossoms as before,
No more the trees seemed rooted to the ground,
A heavy mist seemed gathering all around,
And in its heart some bright thing seemed to be,

And round his head there breathed deliciously
Sweet odours, and that music never ceased.
But as the weight of Death's strong hand increased
Again he sank adown, and Courtain's noise
Within the scabbard seemed a farewell voice
Sent from the world he loved so well of old,
And all his life was as a story told,
And as he thought thereof he 'gan to smile
E'en as a child asleep, but in a while
It was as though he slept, and sleeping dreamed,
For in his half-closed eyes a glory gleamed,
As though from some sweet face and golden hair,
And on his breast were laid soft hands and fair,
And a sweet voice was ringing in his ears,
Broken as if with flow of joyous tears;
"Ogier, sweet friend, hast thou not tarried long?
Alas! thine hundred years of strife and wrong!"
Then he found voice to say, "Alas! dear Lord,
Too long, too long; and yet one little word
Right many a year agone had brought me here."
Then to his face that face was drawn anear,
He felt his head raised up and gently laid
On some kind knee, again the sweet voice said,
"Nay, Ogier, nay, not yet, not yet, dear friend!
Who knoweth when our linked life shall end,
Since thou art come unto mine arms at last,
And all the turmoil of the world is past?
Why do I linger ere I see thy face
As I desired it in that mourning place

So many years ago—so many years,
Thou knewest not thy love and all her fears?"
"Alas!" he said, "what mockery is this
That thou wilt speak to me of earthly bliss?
No longer can I think upon the earth,
Have I not done with all its grief and mirth?
Yes, I was Ogier once, but if my love
Should come once more my dying heart to move,
Then must she come from 'neath the milk-white walls
Whereon to-day the hawthorn blossom falls
Outside St. Omer's—art thou she? her name
I could remember once 'mid death and fame
Is clean forgotten now; but yesterday,
Meseems, our son, upon her bosom lay:
Baldwin the fair—what hast thou done with him
Since Charlot slew him? Ah, mine eyes wax dim;
Woman, forbear! wilt thou not let me die?
Did I forget thee in the days gone by?
Then let me die, that we may meet again!"

He tried to move from her, but all in vain,
For life had well-nigh left him, but withal
He felt a kiss upon his forehead fall,
And could not speak; he felt slim fingers fair
Move to his mighty sword-worn hand, and there
Set on some ring, and still he could not speak,
And once more sleep weighed down his eyelids weak.

BUT, ah! what land was this he woke unto?
What joy was this that filled his heart anew?
Had he then gained the very Paradise?
Trembling, he durst not at the first arise,
Although no more he felt the pain of eld,
Nor durst he raise his eyes that now beheld
Beside him the white flowers and blades of grass;
He durst not speak, lest he some monster was.
But while he lay and hoped, that gentle voice
Once more he heard; "Yea, thou mayst well rejoice!
Thou livest still, my sweet, thou livest still,
Apart from every earthly fear and ill;
Wilt thou not love me, who have wrought thee this,
That I like thee may live in double bliss?"
Then Ogier rose up, nowise like to one
Whose span of earthly life is nigh outrun,
But as he might have risen in old days
To see the spears cleave the fresh morning haze;
But, looking round, he saw no change there was
In the fair place wherethrough he first did pass,
Though all, grown clear and joyous to his eyes,
Now looked no worse than very Paradise;
Behind him were the thorns, the fountain fair
Still sent its glittering stream forth into air,
And by its basin a fair woman stood,
And as their eyes met his renewèd blood
Rushed to his face; with unused thoughts and sweet

And hurrying hopes, his heart began to beat.
The fairest of all creatures did she seem;
So fresh and delicate you well might deem
That scarce for eighteen summers had she blessed
The happy, longing world; yet, for the rest,
Within her glorious eyes such wisdom dwelt
A child before her had the wise man felt,
And with the pleasure of a thousand years
Her lips were fashioned to move joy or tears
Among the longing folk where she might dwell,
To give at last the kiss unspeakable.
In such wise was she clad as folk may be,
Who, for no shame of their humanity,
For no sad changes of the imperfect year,
Rather for added beauty, raiment wear;
For, as the heat-foretelling grey-blue haze
Veils the green flowery morn of late May-days,
Her raiment veiled her; where the bands did meet
That bound the sandals to her dainty feet,
Gems gleamed; a fresh rose-wreath embraced her head,
And on her breast there lay a ruby red.
So with a supplicating look she turned
To meet the flame that in his own eyes burned,
And held out both her white arms lovingly,
As though to greet him as he drew anigh.
Stammering he said, "Who art thou? how am I
So cured of all my evils suddenly,
That certainly I felt no mightier, when,
Amid the backward rush of beaten men,

About me drooped the axe-torn Oriflamme?
Alas! I fear that in some dream I am."
"Ogier," she said, "draw near, perchance it is
That such a name God gives unto our bliss;
I know not, but if thou art such an one
As I must deem, all days beneath the sun
That thou hast had, shall be but dreams indeed
To those that I have given thee at thy need.
For many years ago beside the sea
When thou wert born, I plighted troth with thee:
Come near then, and make mirrors of mine eyes,
That thou mayst see what these my mysteries
Have wrought in thee; surely but thirty years,
Passed amidst joy, thy new-born body bears,
Nor while thou art with me, and on this shore
Art still full-fed of love, shalt thou seem more.
Nay, love, come nigher, and let me take thine hand,
The hope and fear of many a warring land,
And I will show thee wherein lies the spell,
Whereby this happy change upon thee fell."

Like a shy youth before some royal love,
Close up to that fair woman did he move,
And their hands met; yet to his changed voice
He dared not trust; nay, scarcely could rejoice
E'en when her balmy breath he 'gan to feel,
And felt strange sweetness o'er his spirit steal
As her light raiment, driven by the wind,
Swept round him, and, bewildered and half-blind,

His lips the treasure of her lips did press,
And round him clung her perfect loveliness.
For one sweet moment thus they stood, and then
She drew herself from out his arms again,
And panting, lovelier for her love, did stand
Apart awhile, then took her lover's hand,
And, in a trembling voice, made haste to say,—
"O Ogier, when thou camest here to-day,
I feared indeed, that in my sport with fate,
I might have seen thee e'en one day too late,
Before this ring thy finger should embrace;
Behold it, love, and thy keen eyes may trace
Faint figures wrought upon the ruddy gold;
My father dying gave it me, nor told
The manner of its making, but I know
That it can make thee e'en as thou art now
Despite the laws of God—shrink not from me
Because I give an impious gift to thee—
Has not God made me also, who do this?
But I, who longed to share with thee my bliss,
Am of the fays, and live their changeless life,
And, like the gods of old, I see the strife
That moves the world, unmoved if so I will;
For we the fruit, that teaches good and ill,
Have never touched like you of Adam's race;
And while thou dwellest with me in this place
Thus shalt thou be—ah, and thou deem'st, indeed,
That thou shalt gain thereby no happy meed
Reft of the world's joys? nor canst understand

How thou art come into a happy land?—
Love, in thy world the priests of heaven still sing,
And tell thee of it many a joyous thing;
But thinkst thou, bearing the world's joy and pain,
Thou couldst live there? nay, nay, but born again
Thou wouldst be happy with the angels' bliss;
And so with us no otherwise it is,
Nor hast thou cast thine old life quite away
Even as yet, though that shall be to-day.

"But for the love and country thou hast won,
Know thou, that thou art come to Avallon,
That is both thine and mine; and as for me,
Morgan le Fay men call me commonly
Within the world, but fairer names than this
I have for thee and me, 'twixt kiss and kiss."

Ah, what was this? and was it all in vain,
That she had brought him here this life to gain?
For, ere her speech was done, like one turned blind
He watched the kisses of the wandering wind
Within her raiment, or as some one sees
The very best of well-wrought images
When he is blind with grief, did he behold
The wandering tresses of her locks of gold
Upon her shoulders; and no more he pressed
The hand that in his own hand lay at rest:
His eyes, grown dull with changing memories,
Could make no answer to her glorious eyes:
Cold waxed his heart, and weary and distraught,

With many a cast-by, hateful, dreary thought,
Unfinished in the old days; and withal
He needs must think of what might chance to fall
In this life new-begun; and good and bad
Tormented him, because as yet he had
A worldly heart within his frame made new,
And to the deeds that he was wont to do
Did his desires still turn. But she a while
Stood gazing at him with a doubtful smile,
And let his hand fall down; but suddenly
Sounded sweet music from some close nearby,
And then she spoke again: "Come, love, with me,
That thou thy new life and delights mayst see."
And gently with that word she led him thence,
And though upon him now there fell a sense
Of dreamy and unreal bewilderment,
As hand in hand through that green place they went,
Yet therewithal a strain of tender love
A little yet his restless heart did move.

So through the whispering trees they came at last
To where a wondrous house a shadow cast
Across the flowers, and o'er the daisied grass
Before it, crowds of lovely folk did pass,
Playing about in carelessness and mirth,
Unshadowed by the doubtful deeds of earth;
And from the midst a band of fair girls came,
With flowers and music, greeting him by name,
And praising him; but ever like a dream

He could not break, did all to Ogier seem,
And he his old world did the more desire,
For in his heart still burned unquenched the fire,
That through the world of old so bright did burn:
Yet was he fain that kindness to return,
And from the depth of his full heart he sighed.

Then toward the house the lovely Queen did guide
His listless steps, and seemed to take no thought
Of knitted brow or wandering eyes distraught,
But still with kind love lighting up her face
She led him through the door of that fair place,
While round about them did the damsels press;
And he was moved by all that loveliness
As one might be, who, lying half asleep
In the May morning, notes the light wind sweep
Over the tulip-beds: no more to him
Were gleaming eyes, red lips, and bodies slim,
Amidst that dream, although the first surprise
Of hurried love wherewith the Queen's sweet eyes
Had smitten him, still in his heart did stir.

And so at last he came, led on by her
Into a hall wherein a fair throne was,
And hand in hand thereto the twain did pass;
And there she bade him sit, and when alone
He took his place upon the double throne,
She cast herself before him on her knees,
Embracing his, and greatly did increase
The shame and love that vexed his troubled heart:

But now a line of girls the crowd did part,
Lovelier than all, and Ogier could behold
One in their midst who bore a crown of gold
Within her slender hands and delicate;
She, drawing nigh, beside the throne did wait
Until the Queen arose and took the crown,
Who then to Ogier's lips did stoop adown
And kissed him, and said, "Ogier, what were worth
Thy miserable days of strife on earth,
That on their ashes still thine eyes are turned?"
Then, as she spoke these words, his changed heart burned
With sudden memories, and thereto had he
Made answer, but she raised up suddenly
The crown she held and set it on his head,
"Ogier," she cried, "those troublous days are dead;
Thou wert dead with them also, but for me;
Turn unto her who wrought these things for thee!"
Then, as he felt her touch, a mighty wave
Of love swept o'er his soul, as though the grave
Did really hold his body; from his seat
He rose to cast himself before her feet;
But she clung round him, and in close embrace
The twain were locked amidst that thronging place.

Thenceforth new life indeed has Ogier won,
And in the happy land of Avallon
Quick glide the years o'er his unchanging head;
There saw he many men the world thought dead,

Living like him in sweet forgetfulness
Of all the troubles that did once oppress
Their vainly-struggling lives—ah, how can I
Tell of their joy as though I had been nigh?
Suffice it that no fear of death they knew,
That there no talk there was of false or true,
Of right or wrong, for traitors came not there;
That everything was bright and soft and fair,
And yet they wearied not for any change,
Nor unto them did constancy seem strange.
Love knew they, but its pain they never had,
But with each other's joy were they made glad;
Nor were their lives wasted by hidden fire,
Nor knew they of the unfulfilled desire
That turns to ashes all the joys of earth,
Nor knew they yearning love amidst the dearth
Of kind and loving hearts to spend it on,
Nor dreamed of discontent when all was won;
Nor need they struggle after wealth and fame;
Still was the calm flow of their lives the same,
And yet, I say, they wearied not of it—
So did the promised days by Ogier flit.

THINK that a hundred years have now passed by,
Since ye beheld Ogier lie down to die
Beside the fountain; think that now ye are
In France, made dangerous with wasting war;

In Paris, where about each guarded gate,
Gathered in knots, the anxious people wait,
And press around each new-come man to learn
If Harfleur now the pagan wasters burn,
Or if the Rouen folk can keep their chain,
Or Pont de l'Arche unburnt still guards the Seine?
Or if 'tis true that Andelys succour wants?
That Vernon's folk are fleeing east to Mantes?
When will they come? or rather is it true
That a great band the Constable o'erthrew
Upon the marshes of the lower Seine,
And that their long ships, turning back again,
Caught by the high-raised waters of the bore
Were driven here and there and cast ashore?
Such questions did they ask, and, as fresh men
Came hurrying in, they asked them o'er again,
And from scared folk, or fools, or ignorant,
Still got new lies, or tidings very scant.

But now amidst these men at last came one,
A little ere the setting of the sun,
With two stout men behind him, armed right well,
Who ever as they rode on, sooth to tell,
With doubtful eyes upon their master stared,
Or looked about like troubled men and scared.
And he they served was noteworthy indeed;
Of ancient fashion were his arms and weed,
Rich past the wont of men in those sad times;
His face was bronzed, as though by burning climes,

But lovely as the image of a god
Carved in the days before on earth Christ trod;
But solemn were his eyes, and grey as glass,
And like to ruddy gold his fine hair was;
A mighty man he was, and taller far
Than those who on that day must bear the war
The pagans waged: he by the warders stayed
Scarce looked on them, but straight their words obeyed
And showed his pass; then, asked about his name
And from what city of the world he came,
Said, that men called him now the Ancient Knight,
That he was come midst the king's men to fight
From St. Omer's; and as he spoke, he gazed
Down on the thronging street as one amazed,
And answered no more to the questioning
Of frightened folk of this or that sad thing;
But, ere he passed on, turned about at last
And on the wondering guard a strange look cast,
And said, "St. Mary! do such men as ye
Fight with the wasters from across the sea?
Then, certes, are ye lost, however good
Your hearts may be; not such were those who stood
Beside the Hammer-bearer years agone."
So said he, and as his fair armour shone
With beauty of a time long passed away,
So with the music of another day
His deep voice thrilled the awe-struck, listening folk.

Yet from the crowd a mocking voice outbroke,

That cried, "Be merry, masters, fear ye nought,
Surely good succour to our side is brought;
For here is Charlemaine come off his tomb
To save his faithful city from its doom."
"Yea," said another, "this is certain news,
Surely ye know how all the carvers use
To carve the dead man's image at the best,
That guards the place where he may lie at rest;
Wherefore this living image looks indeed,
Spite of his ancient tongue and marvellous weed,
To have but thirty summers."
At the name
Of Charlemaine, he turned to whence there came
The mocking voice, and somewhat knit his brow,
And seemed as he would speak, but scarce knew how;
So with a half-sigh soon sank back again
Into his dream, and shook his well-wrought rein,
And silently went on upon his way.

And this was Ogier: on what evil day
Has he then stumbled, that he needs must come,
Midst war and ravage, to the ancient home
Of his desires? did he grow weary then,
And wish to strive once more with foolish men
For worthless things? or is fair Avallon
Sunk in the sea, and all that glory gone?
Nay, thus it happed—One day she came to him
And said, "Ogier, thy name is waxen dim
Upon the world that thou rememberest not;

The heathen men are thick on many a spot
Thine eyes have seen, and which I love therefore;
And God will give His wonted help no more.
Wilt thou, then, help? canst thou have any mind
To give thy banner once more to the wind?
Since greater glory thou shalt win for this
Than erst thou gatheredst ere thou cam'st to bliss:
For men are dwindled both in heart and frame,
Nor holds the fair land any such a name
As thine, when thou wert living midst thy peers;
The world is worser for these hundred years."

From his calm eyes there gleamed a little fire,
And in his voice was something of desire,
To see the land where he was used to be,
As now he answered: "Nay, choose thou for me,
Thou art the wisest; it is more than well
Within this peaceful place with thee to dwell:
Nor ill perchance in that old land to die,
If, dying, I keep not the memory
Of this fair life of ours." "Nay, nay," said she,
"As to thy dying, that shall never be,
Whiles that thou keepst my ring—and now, behold,
I take from thee thy charmed crown of gold,
And thou wilt be the Ogier that thou wast
Ere on the loadstone rock thy ship was cast:
Yet thou shalt have thy youthful body still,
And I will guard thy life from every ill."

So was it done, and Ogier, armed right well,

Sleeping, was borne away by some strong spell,
And set upon the Flemish coast; and thence
Turned to St. Omer's, with a doubtful sense
Of being in some wild dream, the while he knew
That great delight forgotten was his due,
That all which there might hap was of small worth.
So on he went, and sometimes unto mirth
Did his attire move the country-folk,
But oftener when strange speeches from him broke
Concerning men and things for long years dead,
He filled the listeners with great awe and dread;
For in such wild times as these people were
Are men soon moved to wonder and to fear.

Now through the streets of Paris did he ride,
And at a certain hostel did abide
Throughout that night, and ere he went next day
He saw a book that on a table lay,
And opening it 'gan read in lazy mood:
But long before it in that place he stood,
Noting nought else; for it did chronicle
The deeds of men of old he knew right well,
When they were living in the flesh with him:
Yea, his own deeds he saw, grown strange and dim
Already, and true stories mixed with lies,
Until, with many thronging memories
Of those old days, his heart was so oppressed,
He 'gan to wish that he might lie at rest,
Forgetting all things: for indeed by this

Little remembrance had he of the bliss
That wrapped his soul in peaceful Avallon.

But his changed life he needs must carry on;
For ye shall know the Queen was gathering men
To send unto the good King, who as then
In Rouen lay, beset by many a band
Of those who carried terror through the land,
And still by messengers for help he prayed:
Therefore a mighty muster was being made,
Of weak and strong, and brave and timorous,
Before the Queen anigh her royal house.
So thither on this morn did Ogier turn,
Some certain news about the war to learn;
And when he came at last into the square,
And saw the ancient palace great and fair
Rise up before him as in other days,
And in the merry morn the bright sun's rays
Glittering on gathering helms and moving spears,
He 'gan to feel as in the long-past years,
And his heart stirred within him. Now the Queen
Came from within, right royally beseen,
And took her seat beneath a canopy,
With lords and captains of the war anigh;
And as she came a mighty shout arose,
And round about began the knights to close,
Their oath of fealty there to swear anew,
And learn what service they had got to do.
But so it was, that some their shouts must stay

To gaze at Ogier as he took his way
Through the thronged place; and quickly too he gat
Unto the place whereas the Lady sat,
For men gave place unto him, fearing him:
For not alone was he most huge of limb,
And dangerous, but something in his face,
As his calm eyes looked o'er the crowded place,
Struck men with awe; and in the ancient days,
When men might hope alive on gods to gaze,
They would have thought, 'the Gods yet love our town,
And from the heavens have sent a great one down.'
Withal unto the throne he came so near,
That he the Queen's sweet measured voice could hear;
And swiftly now within him wrought the change
That first he felt amid those faces strange;
And his heart burned to taste the hurrying life
With such desires, such changing sweetness rife.
And yet, indeed, how should he live alone,
Who in the old past days such friends had known?
Then he began to think of Caraheu,
Of Bellicent the fair, and once more knew
The bitter pain of rent and ended love.
But while with hope and vain regret he strove,
He found none 'twixt him and the Queen's high-seat,
And, stepping forth, he knelt before her feet
And took her hand to swear, as was the way
Of doing fealty in that ancient day,
And raised his eyes to hers; as fair was she
As any woman of the world might be,

Full-limbed and tall, dark-haired, from her deep eyes,
The snare of fools, the ruin of the wise,
Love looked unchecked; and now her dainty hand,
The well-knit holder of the golden wand,
Trembled in his, she cast her eyes adown,
And her sweet brow was knitted to a frown,
As he, the taker of such oaths of yore,
Now unto her all due obedience swore,
Yet gave himself no name; and now the Queen,
Awed by his voice as other folk had been,
Yet felt a trembling hope within her rise
Too sweet to think of, and with love's surprise
Her cheek grew pale; she said, "Thy style and name
Thou tellest not, nor what land of thy fame
Is glad; for, certes, some land must be glad,
That in its bounds her house thy mother had."
"Lady," he said, "from what far land I come
I well might tell thee, but another home
Have I long dwelt in, and its name have I
Forgotten now, forgotten utterly
Who were my fellows, and what deeds they did;
Therefore, indeed, shall my first name be hid
And my first country; call me on this day
The Ancient Knight, and let me go my way."
He rose withal, for she her fingers fair
Had drawn aback, and on him 'gan to stare
As one afeard; for something terrible
Was in his speech, and that she knew right well,
Who 'gan to love him, and to fear that she,

Shut out by some strange deadly mystery,
Should never gain from him an equal love;
Yet, as from her high-seat he 'gan to move,
She said, "O Ancient Knight, come presently,
When we have done this muster, unto me,
And thou shalt have thy charge and due command
For freeing from our foes this wretched land!"

Then Ogier made his reverence and went,
And somewhat could perceive of her intent;
For in his heart life grew, and love with life
Grew, and therewith, twixt love and fame, was strife.

But, as he slowly gat him from the square,
Gazing at all the people gathered there,
A squire of the Queen's behind him came,
And breathless, called him by his new-coined name,
And bade him turn because the Queen now bade,
Since by the muster long she might be stayed,
That to the palace he should bring him straight,
Midst sport and play her coming back to wait;
Then Ogier turned, nought loath, and with him went,
And to a postern-gate his steps he bent,
That Ogier knew right well in days of old;
Worn was it now, and the bright hues and gold
Upon the shields above, with lapse of days,
Were faded much: but now did Ogier gaze
Upon the garden where he walked of yore,
Holding the hands that he should see no more;
For all was changed except the palace fair,
That Charlemaine's own eyes had seen built there

Ere Ogier knew him; there the squire did lead
The Ancient Knight, who still took little heed
Of all the things that by the way he said,
For all his thoughts were on the days long dead.
There in the painted hall he sat again,
And 'neath the pictured eyes of Charlemaine
He ate and drank, and felt it like a dream;
And midst his growing longings yet might deem
That he from sleep should wake up presently
In some fair city on the Syrian sea,
Or on the brown rocks of the loadstone isle.
But fain to be alone, within a while
He gat him to the garden, and there passed
By wondering squires and damsels, till at last,
Far from the merry folk who needs must play,
If on the world were coming its last day,
He sat him down, and through his mind there ran
Faint thoughts of that day, when, outworn and wan,
He lay down by the fountain-side to die.
But when he strove to gain clear memory
Of what had happed since on the isle he lay
Waiting for death, a hopeless castaway,
Thought, failing him, would rather bring again
His life among the peers of Charlemaine,
And vex his soul with hapless memories;
Until at last, worn out by thought of these,
And hopeless striving to find what was true,
And pondering on the deeds he had to do
Ere he returned, whereto he could not tell,

Sweet sleep upon his wearied spirit fell.
And on the afternoon of that fair day,
Forgetting all, beneath the trees he lay.

Meanwhile the Queen, affairs of state being done,
Went through the gardens with one dame alone
Seeking for Ogier, whom at last she found
Laid sleeping on the daisy-sprinkled ground,
Dreaming, I know not what, of other days.
Then on him for a while the Queen did gaze,
Drawing sweet poison from the lovely sight,
Then to her fellow turned, "The Ancient Knight—
What means he by this word of his?" she said;
"He were well mated with some lovely maid
Just pondering on the late-heard name of love."
"Softly, my lady, he begins to move,"
Her fellow said, a woman old and grey;
"Look now, his arms are of another day;
None know him or his deeds; thy squire just said
He asked about the state of men long dead;
I fear what he may be; look, seest thou not
That ring that on one finger he has got,
Where figures strange upon the gold are wrought:
God grant that he from hell has not been brought
For our confusion, in this doleful war,
Who surely in enough of trouble are
Without such help;" then the Queen turned aside
Awhile, her drawn and troubled face to hide,
For lurking dread this speech within her stirred;

But yet she said, "Thou sayest a foolish word,
This man is come against our enemies
To fight for us." Then down upon her knees
Fell the old woman by the sleeping knight,
And from his hand she drew with fingers light
The wondrous ring, and scarce again could rise
Ere 'neath the trembling Queen's bewildered eyes
The change began; his golden hair turned white,
His smooth cheek wrinkled, and his breathing light
Was turned to troublous struggling for his breath,
And on his shrunk lips lay the hand of death;
And, scarce less pale than he, the trembling Queen
Stood thinking on the beauty she had seen
And longed for but a little while ago,
Yet with her terror still her love did grow,
And she began to weep as though she saw
Her beauty e'en to such an ending draw.
And 'neath her tears waking he oped his eyes,
And strove to speak, but nought but gasping sighs
His lips could utter; then he tried to reach
His hand to them, as though he would beseech
The gift of what was his: but all the while
The crone gazed on them with an evil smile,
Then holding toward the Queen that wondrous ring,
She said, "Why weep'st thou? having this fair thing,
Thou, losing nought the beauty that thou hast,
May'st watch the vainly struggling world go past,
Thyself unchanged." The Queen put forth her hand
And took the ring, and there awhile did stand

And strove to think of it, but still in her
Such all-absorbing longings love did stir,
So young she was, of death she could not think,
Or what a cup eld gives to man to drink;
Yet on her finger had she set the ring
When now the life that hitherto did cling
To Ogier's heart seemed fading quite away,
And scarcely breathing with shut eyes he lay.
Then, kneeling down, she murmured piteously,
"Ah, wilt thou love me if I give it thee,
And thou grow'st young again? what should I do
If with the eyes thou thus shalt gain anew
Thou shouldst look scorn on me?" But with that word
The hedge behind her, by the west wind stirred
Cast fear into her heart of some one nigh,
And therewith on his finger hastily
She set the ring, then rose and stood apart
A little way, and in her doubtful heart
With love and fear was mixed desire of life.

But standing so, a look with great scorn rife
The elder woman, turning, cast on her,
Pointing to Ogier, who began to stir;
She looked, and all she erst saw now did seem
To have been nothing but a hideous dream,
As fair and young he rose from off the ground
And cast a dazed and puzzled look around,
Like one just waked from sleep in some strange place;
But soon his grave eyes rested on her face,
And turned yet graver seeing her so pale,

And that her eyes were pregnant with some tale
Of love and fear; she 'neath his eyes the while
Forced her pale lips to semblance of a smile,
And said, "O Ancient Knight, thou sleepest then?
While through this poor land range the heathen men,
Unmet of any but my King and Lord:
Nay, let us see the deeds of thine old sword."

"Queen," said he, "bid me then unto this work,
And certes I behind no wall would lurk,
Nor send for succour, while a scanty folk
Still followed after me to break the yoke:
I pray thee grace for sleeping, and were fain
That I might rather never sleep again
Then have such wretched dreams as I e'en now
Have waked from."

Lovelier she seemed to grow
Unto him as he spoke; fresh colour came
Into her face, as though for some sweet shame,
While she with tearful eyes beheld him so,
That somewhat even must his burnt cheek glow,
His heart beat faster. But again she said,
"Nay, will dreams burden such a mighty head?
Then may I too have pardon for a dream;
Last night in sleep I saw thee, who didst seem
To be the King of France; and thou and I
Were sitting at some great festivity
Within the many-peopled gold-hung place."

The blush of shame was gone as on his face
She gazed, and saw him read her meaning clear

And knew that no cold words she had to fear,
But rather that for softer speech he yearned.
Therefore, with love alone her smooth cheek burned;
Her parted lips were hungry for his kiss,
She trembled at the near approaching bliss;
Nathless, she checked her love a little while,
Because she felt the old dame's curious smile
Upon her, and she said, "O Ancient Knight,
If I then read my last night's dream aright,
Thou art come here our very help to be,
Perchance to give my husband back to me;
Come then, if thou this land art fain to save,
And show the wisdom thou must surely have
Unto my council; I will give thee then
What charge I may among my valiant men;
And certes thou wilt do so well herein,
That, ere long, something greater shalt thou win:
Come, then, deliverer of my throne and land,
And let me touch for once thy mighty hand
With these weak fingers."
As she spoke, she met
His eager hand, and all things did forget
But for one moment, for too wise were they
To cast the coming years of joy away;
Then with her other hand her gown she raised
And led him thence, and o'er her shoulder gazed
At her old follower with a doubtful smile,
As though to say, "Be wise, I know thy guile!"
But slowly she behind the lovers walked,

Muttering, "So be it! thou shalt not be balked
Of thy desire; be merry! I am wise,
Nor will I rob thee of thy Paradise
For any other than myself; and thou
May'st even happen to have had enow
Of this new love, before I get the ring,
And I may work for thee no evil thing."

Now ye shall know that the old chronicle,
Wherein I read all this, doth duly tell
Of all the gallant deeds that Ogier did,
There may ye read them; nor let me be chid
If I therefore say little of these things,
Because the thought of Avallon still clings
Unto my heart, and scarcely can I bear
To think of that long, dragging, useless year,
Through which, with dulled and glimmering memory,
Ogier was grown content to live and die
Like other men; but this I have to say,
That in the council chamber on that day
The Old Knight showed his wisdom well enow,
While fainter still with love the Queen did grow
Hearing his words, beholding his grey eyes
Flashing with fire of warlike memories;
Yea, at the last he seemed so wise indeed
That she could give him now the charge, to lead
One wing of the great army that set out
From Paris' gates, midst many a wavering shout,
Midst trembling prayers, and unchecked wails and tears,

And slender hopes and unresisted fears.

Now ere he went, upon his bed he lay,
Newly awakened at the dawn of day,
Gathering perplexed thoughts of many a thing,
When, midst the carol that the birds did sing
Unto the coming of the hopeful sun,
He heard a sudden lovesome song begun
'Twixt two young voices in the garden green,
That seemed indeed the farewell of the Queen.

SONG.

HÆC.

In the white-flowered hawthorn brake,
Love, be merry for my sake;
Twine the blossoms in my hair,
Kiss me where I am most fair—
Kiss me, love! for who knoweth
What thing cometh after death?

ILLE.

Nay, the garlanded gold hair
Hides thee where thou art most fair;
Hides the rose-tinged hills of snow—
Ah, sweet love, I have thee now!
Kiss me, love! for who knoweth
What thing cometh after death?

HÆC.

Shall we weep for a dead day,
Or set Sorrow in our way?
Hidden by my golden hair,
Wilt thou weep that sweet days wear?
Kiss me, love! for who knoweth
What thing cometh after death?

ILLE.

Weep, O Love, the days that flit,
Now, while I can feel thy breath;
Then may I remember it
Sad and old, and near my death.
Kiss me, love! for who knoweth
What thing cometh after death?

Soothed by the pleasure that the music brought
And sweet desire, and vague and dreamy thought
Of happiness it seemed to promise him,
He lay and listened till his eyes grew dim,
And o'er him 'gan forgetfulness to creep
Till in the growing light he lay asleep,
Nor woke until the clanging trumpet-blast
Had summoned him all thought away to cast:
Yet one more joy of love indeed he had
Ere with the battle's noise he was made glad;
For, as on that May morning forth they rode
And passed before the Queen's most fair abode,

There at a window was she waiting them
In fair attire with gold in every hem,
And as the Ancient Knight beneath her passed
A wreath of flowering white-thorn down she cast,
And looked farewell to him, and forth he set
Thinking of all the pleasure he should get
From love and war, forgetting Avallon
And all that lovely life so lightly won;
Yea, now indeed the earthly life o'erpast
Ere on the loadstone rock his ship was cast
Was waxing dim, nor yet at all he learned
To 'scape the fire that erst his heart had burned.
And he forgat his deeds, forgat his fame,
Forgat the letters of his ancient name
As one waked fully shall forget a dream,
That once to him a wondrous tale did seem.

Now I, though writing here no chronicle
E'en as I said, must nathless shortly tell
That, ere the army Rouen's gates could gain
By a broad arrow had the King been slain,
And helpless now the wretched country lay
Beneath the yoke, until the glorious day
When Ogier fell at last upon the foe,
And scattered them as helplessly as though
They had been beaten men without a name:
So when to Paris town once more he came
Few folk the memory of the King did keep
Within their hearts, and if the folk did weep

At his returning, 'twas for joy indeed
That such a man had risen at their need
To work for them so great deliverance,
And loud they called on him for King of France.

But if the Queen's heart were the more a-flame
For all that she had heard of his great fame,
I know not; rather with some hidden dread
Of coming fate, she heard her lord was dead,
And her false dream seemed coming true at last,
For the clear sky of love seemed overcast
With clouds of God's great judgments, and the fear
Of hate and final parting drawing near.

So now when he before her throne did stand
Amidst the throng as saviour of the land,
And she her eyes to his kind eyes did raise,
And there before all her own love must praise;
Then did she fall a-weeping, and folk said,
"See, how she sorrows for the newly dead!
Amidst our joy she needs must think of him;
Let be, full surely shall her grief wax dim
And she shall wed again."

So passed the year,
While Ogier set himself the land to clear
Of broken remnants of the heathen men,
And at the last, when May-time came again,
Must he be crowned King of the twice-saved land,
And at the altar take the fair Queen's hand
And wed her for his own. And now by this

Had he forgotten clean the woe and bliss
Of his old life, and still was he made glad
As other men; and hopes and fears he had
As others, and bethought him not at all
Of what strange days upon him yet should fall
When he should live and these again be dead.

Now drew the time round when he should be wed,
And in his palace on his bed he lay
Upon the dawning of the very day:
'Twixt sleep and waking was he, and could hear
E'en at that hour, through the bright morn and clear,
The hammering of the folk who toiled to make
Some well-wrought stages for the pageant's sake,
Though hardly yet the sparrows had begun
To twitter o'er the coming of the sun,
Nor through the palace did a creature move.

There in the sweet entanglement of love
Midst languid thoughts of greater bliss he lay,
Remembering no more of that other day
Than the hot noon remembereth of the night,
Than summer thinketh of the winter white.

In that sweet hour he heard a voice that cried,
"Ogier, Ogier!" then, opening his eyes wide,
And rising on his elbow, gazed around,
And strange to him and empty was the sound
Of his own name; "Whom callest thou?" he said,
For I, the man who lies upon this bed,
Am Charles of France, and shall be King to-day,

But in a year that now is past away
The Ancient Knight they called me: who is this,
Thou callest Ogier, then, what deeds are his?
And who art thou?" But at that word a sigh,
As of one grieved, came from some place anigh
His bed-side, and a soft voice spake again,
"This Ogier once was great amongst great men;
To Italy a helpless hostage led;
He saved the King when the false Lombard fled,
Bore forth the Oriflamme and gained the day;
Charlot he brought back, whom men led away,
And fought a day-long fight with Caraheu.
The ravager of Rome his right hand slew;
Nor did he fear the might of Charlemaine,
Who for a dreary year beset in vain
His lonely castle; yet at last caught then,
And shut in hold, needs must he come again
To give an unhoped great deliverance
Unto the burdened helpless land of France:
Denmark he gained thereafter, and he wore
The crown of England drawn from trouble sore;
At Tyre then he reigned, and Babylon
With mighty deeds he from the foemen won;
And when scarce aught could give him greater fame,
He left the world still thinking on his name.

"These things did Ogier, and these things didst thou,
Nor will I call thee by a new name now
Since I have spoken words of love to thee—
Ogier, Ogier, dost thou remember me,

E'en if thou hast no thought of that past time
Before thou camest to our happy clime?"

As this was said, his mazed eyes saw indeed
A lovely woman clad in dainty weed
Beside his bed, and many a thought was stirred
Within his heart by that last plaintive word,
Though nought he said, but waited what should come.
"Love," said she, "I am here to bring thee home;
Well hast thou done all that thou cam'st to do,
And if thou bidest here, for something new
Will folk begin to cry, and all thy fame
Shall then avail thee but for greater blame;
Thy love shall cease to love thee, and the earth
Thou lovest now shall be of little worth
While still thou keepest life, abhorring it.
Behold, in men's lives that so quickly flit
Thus is it, how then shall it be with thee,
Who some faint image of eternity
Hast gained through me?—alas, thou heedest not!
On all these changing things thine heart is hot—
Take then this gift that I have brought from far,
And then may'st thou remember what we are;
The lover and the loved from long ago."

He trembled, and more memory seemed to grow
Within his heart as he beheld her stand,
Holding a glittering crown in her right hand:
"Ogier," she said, "arise and do on thee
The emblems of thy worldly sovereignty,

For we must pass o'er many a sea this morn."
He rose, and in the glittering tunic worn
By Charlemaine he clad himself, and took
The ivory hand, that Charlemaine once shook
Over the people's head in days of old;
Then on his feet he set the shoes of gold,
And o'er his shoulders threw the mantle fair,
And set the gold crown on his golden hair:
Then on the royal chair he sat him down,
As though he deemed the elders of the town
Should come to audience; and in all he seemed
To do these things e'en as a man who dreamed.

And now adown the Seine the golden sun
Shone out, as toward him drew that lovely one
And took from off his head the royal crown,
And, smiling, on the pillow laid it down
And said, "Lie there, O crown of Charlemaine,
Worn by a mighty man, and worn in vain,
Because he died, and all the things he did
Were changed before his face by earth was hid;
A better crown I have for my love's head,
Whereby he yet shall live, when all are dead
His hand has helped." Then on his head she set
The wondrous crown, and said, "Forget, forget!
Forget these weary things, for thou hast much
Of happiness to think of."
At that touch
He rose, a happy light gleamed in his eyes;

And smitten by the rush of memories,
He stammered out, "O love! how came we here?
What do we in this land of Death and Fear?
Have I not been from thee a weary while?
Let us return—I dreamed about the isle;
I dreamed of other years of strife and pain,
Of new years full of struggles long and vain."

She took him by the hand and said, "Come, love,
I am not changed;" and therewith did they move
Unto the door, and through the sleeping place
Swiftly they went, and still was Ogier's face
Turned on her beauty, and no thought was his
Except the dear returning of his bliss.

But at the threshold of the palace-gate
That opened to them, she awhile did wait,
And turned her eyes unto the rippling Seine
And said, "O love, behold it once again!"
He turned, and gazed upon the city grey
Smit by the gold of that sweet morn of May;
He heard faint noises as of wakening folk
As on their heads his day of glory broke;
He heard the changing rush of the swift stream
Against the bridge-piers. All was grown a dream,
His work was over, his reward was come,
Why should he loiter longer from his home?

A little while she watched him silently,
Then beckoned him to follow with a sigh,
And, raising up the raiment from her feet,

Across the threshold stepped into the street;
One moment on the twain the low sun shone,
And then the place was void, and they were gone
How I know not; but this I know indeed,
That in whatso great trouble or sore need
The land of France since that fair day has been,
No more the sword of Ogier has she seen.

SUCH was the tale he told of Avallon,
E'en such an one as in days past had won
His youthful heart to think upon the quest;
But to those old hearts nigh in reach of rest,
Not much to be desired now it seemed—
Perchance the heart that of such things had dreamed
Had found no words in this death-laden tongue
We speak on earth, wherewith they might be sung;
Perchance the changing years that changed his heart
E'en in the words of that old tale had part,
Changing its sweet to bitter, to despair
The foolish hope that once had glittered there—
Or think, that in some bay of that far home
They then had sat, and watched the green waves come
Up to their feet with many promises;
Or the light wind midst blossom-laden trees,
In the sweet Spring had weighted many a word
Of no worth now, and many a hope had stirred
Long dead for ever.

Howsoe'er that be
Among strange folk they now sat quietly,
As though that tale with them had nought to do,
As though its hopes and fears were something new.

But though, indeed, the outworn, dwindled band
Had no tears left for that once longed-for land,
The very wind must moan for their decay,
And from the sky, grown dull, and low, and grey,
Cold tears must fall upon the lonely field,
That such fair golden hopes erewhile did yield;
And on the blackening woods, wherein the doves
Sat silent now, forgetful of their loves.
Yet, since a little life at least was left,
They were not yet of every joy bereft,
For long ago was past the agony,
Midst which they found that they indeed must die;
And now well nigh as much their pain was past
As though death's veil already had been cast
Over their heads—so, midst some little mirth,
They watched the dark night hide the gloomy earth.

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